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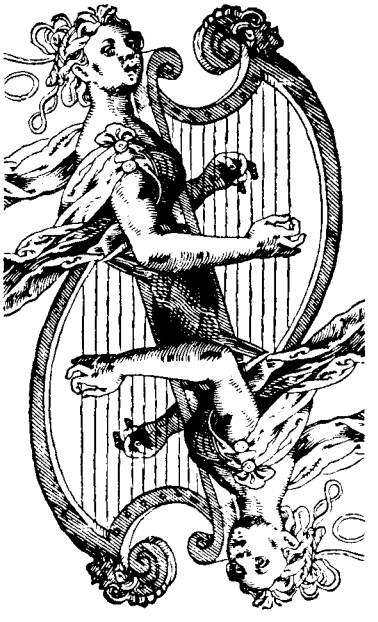

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The Despairing Optimist . . . . . .

RENÉ DUBOS

The 1970s have witnessed a number of huge, highly publicized international conferences sponsored by the United Nations to work out global solutions for various contemporary problems of humankind. The mere list of these international talkfests is impressive: U.N. Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972); World Population (Bucharest, 1974); Food (Rome, 1974); International Woman's Year (Mexico City, 1975); Human Settlements: Habitat (Vancouver, 1976); Employment (Geneva, 1976); Law of the Seas (Caracas, Geneva, New York, 1974-76). At least two more conferences are scheduled for 1977—one on water to be convened in Mar del Plata, Argentina, during March; and one on desertificaton probably to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, during August–September. Several others were organized during the past few years to deal with world monetary problems, multinational companies, the various forms of racism, and probably other topics that escaped my attention.

I have attended only one of these international conferences—that on the human environment held in Stockholm—but I was involved directly or indirectly in the preparation of three others (World Population, Food, Human Settlements: Habitat) and I have carefully studied their proceedings. The fact that each lasted more than two weeks and had several thousand official and nonofficial participants earned them the well-deserved title of megaconferences. One of their most impressive aspects was that they were attended by government representatives of practically all nations, and also by hordes of nongovernmental organizations from all continents.

Whatever the subject discussed, the megaconferences were conducted according to much the same pattern, as if they had to follow a preordained universal ritual. They began with resounding statements of critical global problems and with a clarion call for international cooperation. As soon as the substantive deliberations began, however, they became platforms for political manifestos that generated intense political controversies. Any concern for concrete problems was hopelessly diluted in a flood of ideological verbiage. Then, in the last hours of the last day of the conferences, frantic efforts were made to set down a statement of consensus. The final stage of the ritual was a declaration so broadly and vaguely worded as to save face for all the participants and avoid committing them to a specific course of action. The official result of most of these conferences was thus a series of "cosmetic resolutions" (to use a phrase that was current among observers and participants), many of which could not be converted into action programs.

The ritual of these megaconferences was established at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. The Stockholm declaration forcefully affirmed and documented that a global effort was essential to deal with environmental degradation, with the depletion of natural resources, and with their more equitable distribution. But it also emphasized that the measures taken to this end should not interfere with the right of individual nations to proceed with what they considered essential for their technological development.

The Vancouver "Declaration of Human

RENÉ DUBOS is professor emeritus at the Rockefeller University. His newest book, just published, is *The Professor, the Institute, and DNA.*

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Settlements, 1976" was even broader and more vague in scope than that of the preceding conferences. It stated the very obvious truth that "the improvement of the quality of life of human beings is the first and most important objective of every human settlement policy." On this unobjectionable basis it formulated a set of sixty-four recommendations to governments suggesting ways in which people everywhere might be assured the fundamental requirements of human habitation: a decent physical environment, providing not only clean water, sanitation, and shelter, but also the opportunity for cultural growth and development of the individual. The only surprising aspect of the Habitat Conference was that thousands of educated and influential people had to be airlifted from all over the world to Vancouver, and provided with tons of documents supplemented with a plethora of audio-visual aids, before they could reach such commonsense conclusions.

Along with its well-meaning generalities, the Habitat declaration contained political statements that made it unacceptable to many official delegates. In fact, several of the participating governments refused to sign it, because certain parts of it dealt with problems of international politics that had little if anything to do with human settlements. The paucity of concrete achievements in Vancouver and the irrelevant political propagandizing that occupied much of the meeting have led many observers of international affairs to suggest that Habitat may well have been "the last of the megaconferences." If this turns out to be the case, however, it will not be because these conferences have been useless but because they have been contaminated with international politics. Furthermore, it is also probable that they have already accomplished most of what could be expected from such global meetings.

The series of international conferences that began in Stockholm in 1972 has served the purpose of generating a global awareness of certain dangers that threaten all nations, rich and poor—an achievement that is certainly of greater practical importance than is commonly realized. Despite the information about global problems which is widely distributed by the mass media, it is not easy for the general public or even for statesmen to appreciate the fact that we are interdependent because we live on a small spaceship with finite resources where all of us can eventually become victims of the same shortages and disasters. Global thinking does not come naturally to human beings. In fact, it is an uncomfortable exercise because our intellectual and emotional processes have not been geared to a global view of the planet and its population. It is only when people from all parts of the world gather in one place, listen to each other's problems, and wonder at the magnitude and diversity of these problems that they realize how crowded we are on our small planet, how limited are its resources, and how multifarious and ubiquitous are the dangers to which we are all exposed.

The most important contribution of the conference may have been, however, not to heighten global consciousness but to dramatize the diversity of the globe. Granted that the delegates did engage in much posturing and propagandizing throughout all the conferences, they also learned a great deal from personal contacts with their counterparts from other lands. These contacts made it obvious to all that shared global problems appear in a different light depending upon the national point of view. In Stockholm, the American environmental purists came to preach the academic ecological gospel, but soon discovered that abject poverty is perhaps the worst form of pollution and that poor countries have legitimate reasons to be more interested in economic development than in trying to maintain ecological equilibrium. In Vancouver there were many charges against colonialism and against exploitation by superpowers, but those who formulated these charges were eager to learn how the problems of water supply, low-cost housing, and sustainable rural development could be solved with the help of the advanced technology that only superpowers could provide.

The international conferences of the 1970s also helped to define the dimensions of the global problems. According to figures published by the World Bank, a diversion of only 10 percent of the global arms budget for one decade would supply all the financial resources necessary to provide food, shelter, clean water, medical assistance, and essential transport facilities for all the people in all the

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human settlements of the planet. Creating a decent habitat for all people thus appears to be within the financial possibilities of the international community. The chief problem is neither technical nor financial, but one of social will and political know-how.

Paradoxically, the most practical contribution of the international conferences may have been to suggest that, even in the case of global problems, the best and perhaps the only possible solutions are those which are worked out in each particular locality and which take into account the peculiarities of its natural, social, and cultural constraints as well as of its resources.

Our globe is so diverse, both physically and socially, that most ecologic, technologic, and economic problems can be tackled successfully, with the precision they demand, only by dealing with them at the regional or national level, in their unique cultural context. The recommendations of the Habitat Conference are instructive in this regard. They are fairly explicit when they deal with the need for decent shelters and for a supply of clean water because these biological necessities are common to all human beings and can be defined in scientific terms. But they sound rather abstract when they refer to personal development, cultural growth, or improvement in the quality of life because these values have national and individual characteristics that transcend scientific determinism.

The establishment of a desirable human environment implies more than the maintenance of ecological equilibrium, more than the wise management of natural resources, and more than the control of the forces that affect biological and mental health. It also requires that individuals and social groups be provided with the opportunity to develop surroundings, ways of life, and cultures of their own choice. Scientific knowledge is certainly essential in dealing with the problems of the globe and of the world population as a whole, but a humanistic attitude is required wherever persons and social groups are concerned. In most human affairs the ideal is to think globally and to act locally.

It may seem futile to advocate local solutions at a time when powerful trends toward uniformity and interdependence are being generated all over the earth by technological forces as well as by the increasing geographic and economic mobility of people. Along with this trend, however, there is an opposite trend toward regionalism that appears to be as powerful and as worldwide. The earth may be in the process of becoming a global village when it comes to the spread of news and especially of gossip, but in many other respects the trend is toward differentiation rather than unification.

Despite the alleged unifying influence of electronics and jet travel, the past few decades have witnessed a phenomenal increase in political, economic, and even cultural diversity all over the earth. Each nation uses international gatherings as platforms to affirm its identity; each ethnic group within a given nation takes advantage of any event to publicize its history, its heroes, and its traditions. Whatever its political complexion, every government formulates its own kind of master plan for long-range economic development and its own ideal of the future. Most prosperous, highly industrialized countries are now worried about environmental degradation and are trying to design their industrial policies within the framework of ecological and social constraints. In contrast, most poor countries are eager to develop technologically as fast as possible, regardless of ecological consequences and even at the risk of sacrificing their cultural traditions.

National and regional characteristics have a stubborn persistence that makes a mockery of our freewheeling discourses about One World, Only One Earth, and the Global Village. Although the Japanese economy has been revolutionized by industrialization, it is still based on a social structure similar to that of preindustrial Japan. The Mandate from Heaven that underlay the absolute rule of the Chinese emperors was reincarnated for two decades in the wisdom of Mao Tse-tung and will probably reemerge in a technocratic form after China has been industrialized. The cultural and social traditions of Mexico will certainly condition its further development, just as the ancient tribal patterns of Africa will long influence the policies of the new African nations.

Cultural regionalism is furthermore likely to be strengthened wherever people achieve

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greater physical and social mobility as a result of greater wealth. One's place of residence used to be generally determined by accident of birth and by the need to find a gainful occupation. In contrast, more and more people now select a place for work or retirement on the basis of their individual tastes. Some seek a semitropical atmosphere, others a lively urban or a pastoral environment, still others a rugged scenery or climate. Who settles where is often determined by environmental preferences rather than by necessity, particularly in the United States. Such differences of taste with regard to residence will almost inevitably be expressed in different styles of living and cultural trends. It is therefore likely that the sense of place will increasingly enhance regionalism as more and more people can choose the place where they settle.

Many people, furthermore, are not only place seekers, but place makers. One of their criteria in selecting an area in which to live and work is the possibility of imposing a pattern of their own on their environment. Throughout history, place makers have shaped the regional distinctiveness of landscapes, dwellings, and cityscapes by modifying the lay of the land, introducing new vegetation, using available materials and local forces, according to their own design. Land use in East Anglia differs from what it is on the French side of the English Channel not because of differences in climate or natural history in these two neighboring parts of the world, which were almost identical in the state of wilderness, but because place makers have imposed on them distinctive patterns of man-nature relationships. Similarly, the landscapes and cityscapes of Sweden differ from those of other Scandinavian countries in large part as a result of different human interventions into nature.

Despite the uniformizing influence of technology and the great mobility of people, regional patterns also persist in the United States with regard to social behavior. People who decide to settle in Oregon tend to differ in temperament from those who choose Washington State. The same can be said for Vermont versus New Hampshire, Arizona versus Southern California. The most intense environmental chauvinism is usually displayed by people who have migrated into an area from another part of the country—for example by New Yorkers who have settled in Vermont or Californians who have settled in Oregon.

At the turn of the century, Frederick Jackson Turner had visualized the role that regionalism was likely to play in the social evolution of the United States. Three decades after the publication of his famous book, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, he postulated that, since the frontier experience had vanished because the whole continent had been settled, the "sections" would become increasingly important in shaping attitudes and policies. He used the word *section* to denote the natural regions of the continent.

The marvelous diversity of natural environments in the United States is, of course, one of the great assets of this country. It has determined in large part its economic structure and has contributed to its phenomenal achievements in agriculture and industry. Environmental diversity is also reflected in American cultural life, but in a less creative manner. There have always been distinctive regional cultures in the United States, each influenced by local environmental conditions, but they have been eroded during the last century by technological forces and by population mobility. For the reasons mentioned above, however, they may flourish again as more and more people become interested in the unique characteristics of the place where they elect to live.

The enormous differences in traditions, tastes, and aspirations among the various nations and regions of the earth thus make it impossible for international conferences to formulate recommendations having global application to cultural development or even to economic growth. Such recommendations can be made acceptable to all the participants of these conferences only by being generalized beyond any operational usefulness. While certain natural constraints make it imperative to think globally, in practice each social group must work out its own fate and act locally.

The megaconferences recently organized by the United Nations have played the important historical role of creating a global consciousness of the critical urgency to pro-

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tect the physical environment of the earth and to satisfy the fundamental needs common to all human beings. But they have also made it clear that concern for our Only One Earth and for the world population problem is not sufficient to assure the quality of life.

Candide realized at the end of his tumultuous life that the quest for happiness eventually leads to tending one's own garden; similarly each nation will probably discover that the best way to solve its problems is to stick to its own affairs. But while global thinking is no substitute for local action, perpetuating national sovereignty in its present form would be suicidal because global interdependence will be of increasing importance in many crucial aspects of human life and of the physical environment. As we enter the global phase of human evolution, it becomes obvious that we all have two countries, our own and Planet Earth. While weeding the cabbage patch in our own garden, we must remember the heady excitement that enlivened the megaconferences of the 1970s, when humankind experienced delirious hopes for the future of our Only One Earth.

The conclusion of a recent book on American folklife seems applicable here: "As we face the serious world problems . . . it is the more crucial that we reaffirm our pluralism and cherish our differences while singing each other's songs."

Rubenesque

DAVID BERGMAN

The fat woman wishes she were fatter.
"I am too small," she complains,
half-convinced of her insignificance
and yet unresigned to it.
She keeps to her room.
There she dominates, bending
the chairs to her iron will,
dragging the bed down with her
insatiable demands.
And because like Nature
she, too, abhors a vacuum,
all remaining space is filled
with memorabilia and underwear.
At night she prays,
"Please, Lord, make me so big
that when I move the tides will follow."

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Life and Letters

Observing the Sabbath

ARISTIDES

The sun shines through the shutter slats. An eye opens and sights, on the digital clock upon the night table, the numbers 8:12. More than two hours have elapsed beyond the time when one is accustomed to wake. Avarice for time is no less a compulsion than avarice for money, perhaps a greater. How to make up those missing hours? Then, creeping up from the edge of subconsciousness, comes the sweet realization that this is not a regular day at all; and hence the regular rhythms of regular daily living can be relaxed. It is Sunday, blessed Sunday.

Under Christianity, of course, Sunday is literally blessed. The third century *Didascalia Apostolorum* held, "On Sunday be always joyful, for he who is afflicted on Sunday commits a sin." Gibbon reminds us that in 321 A.D. the Emperor Constantine published an edict which "enjoined the solemn observance of Sunday." The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963) of the Second Vatican Council says: "The Lord's day is the original feast day," and should be observed "as a day of joy and of freedom from work." Yet if Sunday be officially a Christian day, one does not—to work a twist on an old rye bread advertisement—have to be gentile to love it.

Not that everyone everywhere has loved Sunday. At the beginning of his essay "The Superannuated Man," Charles Lamb speaks of his own gentle reservations about Sunday, his one day free from his job at the countinghouse. "In particular," he wrote, "there is a gloom for me attendant upon a city Sunday, a weight in the air. . . . Those eternal bells depress me. The closed shops repel me." In *Little Dorrit* Dickens has not a single good word for Sunday. "Nothing for the spent toiler to do but to compare the monotony of his six days, think what a weary life he led, and make the best of it—or the worst, according to the probabilities." "Heaven forgive me," says Mr. Arthur Clennam, the Dickens character who thinks these thoughts, "and those who trained me. How I have hated this day!" But then as now Sunday has never had a very good press in England, where, more recently, it has been thought of as *Sunday, Bloody Sunday.*

Sunday has been better thought of in France. One thinks here of languid summer afternoons: of provincial fairs in Flaubert, of the democratic calm of Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte," of the elegance of aristocratic Sundays along the Guermantes Way. Modern Greece gave us *Never on Sunday.* Although Tolstoy satirized it in *Resurrection,* under the czars church services were held in Russian prisons on Sundays. (In the slave labor camps, Solzhenitsyn notes, "Tolstoy's dream had come true: Prisoners are no longer compelled to attend religious services.") In present-day South Africa, Nadine Gordimer writes: "While white people picnic, Sundays are the most dreadful days of all in Soweto: funerals, the only category of public gathering not banned, have become huge mass meetings where the obsequies of the riot victim being buried are marked by new deaths and fresh wounds as the police attack mourners singing freedom songs and shaking black power salutes."

Fortunately, here in the United States the worst that Sunday has ever brought us is boredom. Yet it has generally been boredom of a rather luxuriant kind. In *Origins,* his etymological dictionary, Eric Partridge informs us that the ice cream sundae doubtless derives from the word Sunday, perhaps because "whereas an ordinary ice-cream was good enough for a weekday, only this special kind was good enough for a Sunday." The specialness of Sunday was, in an America

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of another day, denoted by dress: by the idea of Sunday clothes. As a Negro child growing up in Oklahoma City, Ralph Ellison has recalled:

> As a kid I remember working it out this way: there was a world in which you wore your everyday clothes on Sunday, and there was a world in which you wore your Sunday clothes every day—I wanted the world in which you wore your Sunday clothes every day. I wanted it because it represented something better, a more exciting and civilized and human way of living; a world which came to me through certain scenes of felicity which I encountered in fiction, in the movies, and which I glimpsed sometimes through the windows of great houses on Sunday afternoons when my mother took my brother and me for walks through the wealthy white sections of the city. I know it now for a boy's vague dream of possibility. . . .

Much of the specialness as well as the boredom of Sunday derived from its being the Lord's day. Churchgoing dominated Sunday, and among many sects—most commonly in the South—one attended church not only in the morning but yet again after the evening meal. Unless one felt a strong sense of religious calling or a heightened sense of tradition, the strain of boredom could be excruciating—especially among the very young, who, it could be argued, stood most in need of religious instruction and in temperament were least prepared to receive it. But religious boredom—or rather the boredom with religion—was not suffered by the young alone. Not so many years ago, writing about the then intellectually fashionable God Is Dead controversy, Malcolm Muggeridge recalled attending an Anglican church in England. No sooner did the vicar open his mouth to intone the text of that Sunday's sermon, Muggeridge remarked, than God would be gone. But now, he concluded, with fewer and fewer people attending church, there was really scarcely anything else to think about but God.

Although there is almost always talk of revived interest in formal religion in America, perhaps now, with a seriously churchgoing president in office, we shall hear even more talk than usual about religious revival. Yet in such matters numbers seem so much less significant than quality, and it is quality that is so difficult to determine. At a time of scrambled values, no job poses greater awkwardness than the clergyman's. A dear friend of mine, whose father had recently died, decided, after many years' absence, to return to Sunday morning church services at an Episcopal church near her home. She thought the clear and quiet space provided by the church a good place in which to think about her father. She went once; then on the second Sunday the youngish priest offered a prayer "for Patty Hearst and her associates." God, one might say, was gone, and so, on the third Sunday, was my friend.

When clergymen press so for relevance, how much more sensible it seems to choose, along with the heroine of Wallace Stevens's gorgeous poem "Sunday Morning," the "Complacencies of the peignoir, and late coffee and oranges in a sunny chair, and the green freedom of a cockatoo upon a rug. . . ." For reasons that go beyond the graspings of clergymen to discover what is important to their parishioners, Sundays have become increasingly, immitigably, immutably more secular. To pick up on Wallace Stevens again:

> Divinity must live within herself:
> Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
> Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
> Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
> Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
> All pleasures and all pains, remembering
> The bough of summer and the winter branch.
> These are the measures destined for her soul.

Inevitably, our American Sunday has changed—and so drastically as scarcely to seem the same day it once was. How has it changed? Why has it changed? What are the discernible consequences of the change?

The most patent change in the American Sunday is in the fairly recent alteration of commerce, and chiefly that of retailing. Where once stores stayed closed on Sundays, today Sunday has come to be a major shopping day. Blue laws—so termed because commonly ascribed to puritanical bluenoses who wished to tell people what they could and could not do on Sunday—once made such shopping illegal in most states. Sometimes enforced, sometimes not, blue laws provided a strange congeries of impermissible Sunday activities. Under these laws, barbers, for example, could cut hair on Sunday in Califor-

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nia, though they were forbidden to do so in Arizona, while in Massachusetts barbers were permitted to shave an aged invalid. Retail sales were fined $100 in Virginia, though the state's smoked and cured hams were excluded from the ban. The advent of the shopping center and of the discount store, both following much of middle-class life out to the suburbs, eventually caused the removal of many of the old blue laws from the books of many of the states. Once the turnstiles were opened, Americans by the millions brushed through them.

I note that Salisbury College in Maryland has instituted something called "Leisure Studies." Do they, I wonder, consider shopping a leisure-time activity? If not, perhaps they should, for not only is much shopping now done on Sunday—some years ago discount stores claimed that as much as 35 percent of their gross sales were made on Sunday—but shopping has become something on the order of a major American sport. Nor is it solely a spectator sport. Along with shopping in shops, the last few years have witnessed the emergence, in rather a widespread way, of the garage sale—or yard, house, or apartment sale—which more often than not takes place on Sunday. Everyman his own Wanamaker.

Here perhaps is the place to insert the standard paragraph on American crassness and materialism. This, though, is something I find myself singularly unable to do. Not only have I pulled my car over to the curb to attend a number of these Sunday sales, but not long ago, before a recent move, I staged a rather successful one of my own. What mystifying events these sales can be! Why, for example, when I stop to inspect the goods at a garage sale at a home that cannot be worth less than a quarter of a million dollars, do I find nothing on sale but ashtrays, old dishes, and worn-out clothes? What possibly can be the point for people who are clearly beyond such penny economies in selling an ashtray for 35 cents? One might answer that it is by not throwing out an ashtray that such people were able to acquire a quarter-of-a-million-dollar house in the first place. But I wonder if a more persuasive reason is that such a sale, quite apart from what small profit it might bring in, fills up the day.

Sunday, for some, can be interminable. "Sunday," Dr. Johnson told Boswell, "was a heavy day to me when I was a boy. My mother confined me on that day, and made me read *The Whole Duty of Man*." Others who find it even heavier include couples whose marriages have gone sour, businessmen with no aptitude for leisure, the familyless and the friendless—such people can testify to the endlessness of Sundays. At the one apartment sale I staged, some of these people, less than serendipitous in their wanderings, had come to the sale, as they will doubtless go to other such sales, not so much with the small greed of the bargain hunter in their hearts as with the hunger of the truly lonely.

Dr. Johnson believed in the strict observance of Sunday. "It should be different," he observed, "from another day. People may walk but not throw stones at birds. There may be relaxation, but there should be no levity." While I have not, to the best of my recollection, thrown stones at birds, I have most certainly violated the Johnsonian stricture against levity. Growing up when I did, in the 1940s, Sunday always began precisely on a note of levity. I refer to the chief interest of children in the Sunday newspapers: the comics, or, as they were sometimes called, the funny papers. In my childhood, my father read these to me; then I recall a local radio show that read the funny papers along with me; and later, with passion for them only slackening in early adolescence, I read them, Sunday and daily, myself. My own children have never consistently read the Sunday funnies—perhaps, having been surfeited by the cartoon offerings of television during the week, they had no hunger for them—but I remember loving them unabashedly.

For me, nowadays, Sunday morning begins with the *New York Times*, which is, as everyone knows, devoid of comics, but not by any means of comedy. As with so many other Americans, I have for some time been a member of the church called the Gray Lady of the Sunday *New York Times*, worshiping at the altar of cultural and current events. As with church, so with the Sunday *New York Times*: a sense of duty is involved, but how pleasant it is on those mornings when one remains in bed. Still, most Sunday mornings one gets through it, not so secretly pleased when there is nothing that requires reading in either the

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Magazine or the *Book Review*. Of late, I note that the *New York Times* has tried to spread Sunday throughout the week, with its special "Weekend" section on Fridays, and, more recently, its "Living Section" on Wednesdays. I gather that both have been a commercial success, resulting in its greater circulation on the days when they appear, yet I feel somewhat resentful toward them. Somehow one can accommodate all the added trivia on Sunday, but it does not go down so easily on weekdays—it is, in fact, rather like eating chocolates for breakfast.

The essence of the current Sunday is that on it we are more tolerant, if not more indulgent, of ourselves. Not so much a letting go as a letting up is involved. For some it takes the form of lying abed, for others of getting out: on tennis courts, ski slopes, lakes, and links. The most disciplined man I know used to allow himself to take Sunday morning off for reading, with no motive but pleasure. Pace everywhere slackens. In cities in summer, older couples seek the beach; younger couples—because both parties work during the week—seek the laundromats. Such rhythm as the day has is barely perceptible. At their best, Sundays are hibernant, digressive, restorative. William James somewhere speaks of the dues that are owed to oneself, the small change of self-indulgence that is necessary to each of us if we are to achieve mental equilibrium, and Sunday seems the day on which these dues are best paid.

One of the chief ways of paying them has been through sport, which, in our time, has grown much more popular through democratization. Such sports as golf and tennis, once almost exclusively the Sunday pastimes of those who could afford to belong to a country club, are now played without bar by anyone who is interested. Something similar can be said of the more exotic—and more costly—sports of skiing and sailing. To walk through large American sporting goods stores—open, almost all of them, on Sunday—is to realize afresh what a wealthy country we are. Apart from the essentially boyish sports of baseball, football, basketball, and hockey, one finds in these stores rifles and rafts, tennis and jogging clothes, 10-speed bicycles, equipment for court sports of all sorts, darts and Frisbees and soccer balls and Ping-Pong tables, and scores of models of different kinds of sneakers. An up-to-date theory of the leisure class in the United States would very nearly have to be a sociological study of the nation, for we are almost all leisure class now.

This is not to speak of more strictly spectator sports, which remain by and large a masculine preoccupation and which can take up a good part of Sunday in almost any season. Going to ball games—football or baseball, major or minor league—has long been an established Sunday outing, as has listening to them over the radio been a traditional Sunday afternoon activity (lapsing, in my experience, into another traditional Sunday afternoon activity: the nap). But with television this has changed, and radically. Viewing sports can now easily fill the day. Not one but two or three pro football games are offered in the autumn and winter; in spring and summer, golf follows baseball or tennis as night follows day. This past baseball season one of the divisional play-off games was played on a Sunday night. The motive was clearly commercial—it was scheduled so as not to lose any serious portion of the audience to the pro football games also broadcast on Sunday afternoons—but the break with tradition was complete.

Deeper as well as more general changes have been at work altering the nature of the traditional American Sunday. Not least among these changes has been the gradual, but by now thorough, evolution of American work patterns. For one thing, over roughly the past two decades the American work week has largely gone from a six- to a five-day week; for another, more women, especially wives, have gone to work out in the world. From these two changes all sorts of others have followed.

With two days free, rather than one, the specialness of Sunday has been somewhat diluted. The weekend, in this new scheme of things, looms larger than the Sabbath. With two days off one can make plans, invest enterprise in leisure. Hitting the road in one's recreational vehicle ("reck-veek," as they are not very happily called), taking off for a skiing, tennis, or gambling weekend, retreating to one's country cottage—things once only possible to the privileged—are now more widely accessible to the multitudes. As Sun-

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day was once an at-home day, the weekend now frequently provides the reverse possibility: a chance to get away from home.

With more women working at jobs, the weekend, and Sunday as part of it, belongs fully as much to them as to men. When only the men in the household worked, in many homes Sundays were devoted to the ease of men, the breadwinners. For obvious reasons this is no longer so. In how many homes in America is Sunday dinner still the serious event it once was? (In England, more than two centuries ago, Dean Swift complained: "That Luxury and Excess men usually practise upon this Day . . . dividing the time between God and their Bellies, when, after a gluttonous meal, their senses dozed and stupefied, they retire to God's House to sleep out the Afternoon.") Now, working themselves, women can no longer fairly be charged with the responsibility for an elaborate Sunday meal. Two breadwinners in the home has meant, increasingly, sandwiches.

Along with the Sunday dinner, another Sunday institution that appears to have gone by the boards—one that my own generation, now in its forties, may be the last to remember—is the Sunday drive. The idea of a drive as a pleasure in and of itself now seems rather bizarre. Unless one lives in certain attractive rural sections of the country, whatever can be the point of a Sunday drive, for whatever is there to see? Apart from convenience, no delights are to be found on the freeways, nor any surprises on the franchise-lined Ventura Boulevards of our nation. Since freeways did not then exist, as often as not one used to drive through the city. Although the purpose of the Sunday drive was more lighthearted—its purpose was, simply, a family outing—one of its side benefits was a lesson in sociology, for as one drove through neighborhoods both richer and poorer than one's own, one saw how the other half, or (in the case of middle-class families like my own) the other two halves, lived.

The Sunday drive usually had no greater goal than a longish ride for an ice-cream soda or sundae. Sometimes, though, its destination would be the cemetery. But more often it would be a visit with cousins living in another part of the city. Customs that nowadays seem almost quaint accompanied these visits—bringing along a box of chocolates to the living or planting flowers on the graves of the dead. Visits to the cemetery perplexed and bored me, for death is, I think, perplexing and boring generally to the young. Visits to living relatives I found a pleasure; I had a number of cousins of my age almost all of whom I adored. Death, relocation, estrangement have, over the decades since those days, taken their toll, and I no longer see these cousins. Were I to set out on a Sunday drive today, I am not at all sure in which direction I would head.

Sunday may indeed be fun day, as a commercial for a schlock clothing store in the Middle West has it, but not so long ago it used to be, for better or worse, family day all over America. Nearly everything about it seemed to be organized around the family, and around an extended family at that: children, cousins, bachelor uncles, widowed aunts, grandparents. I say "for better or worse" because many people find it worse. So much family seems to them suffocating, sordid, oppressive in the extreme. When they hear the word Sunday, they reach for their blanket, so as to pull it over their heads; or for their telephones, so as to call their psychoanalysts. Yet it is those people without family who seem to yearn for it most. Is family one of life's pleasures—peace and quiet are two others—that is most earnestly desired when it is absent, almost unbearable when one is immersed in it?

I do not know if this is an emotion universally felt, but I have discovered that I am not alone in feeling what I have come to think of as "Sunday night *triste*," a feeling of the blues that comes upon me dependably each Sunday roughly at dusk. What does this tinge of sadness signify? Expectations disappointed? A yearning for a time now gone and not ever to be recaptured? Regret for the winding down of another week, during the course of which one achieved (yet again!) less than one had hoped? Sorrowful anticipation of still another week ahead? Or is it—more simply and more persuasively—sadness at the passing of Sunday itself, one of life's minor pleasures that is now once again no less than a full six days off?

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Freedom of Expression: Too Much of a Good Thing?

JOHN SPARROW

I SUPPOSE THAT ALMOST EVERYBODY IN GREAT BRITAIN TODAY, and almost everybody in the United States, if challenged on the subject of free speech, would say that he was in favor of it—although he might not be clear in his mind about what he meant by "free" or about what was to be included in the notion of "speech." Does "speech" in this context extend, for example, to printed and published words? Does it cover not only verbal but also pictorial and other forms of self-expression? Does it include every form of verbal utterance? In the course of arguments about free speech, extreme libertarians sometimes invoke the saying attributed to Voltaire: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it," as if Voltaire were asserting that everyone ought always to be allowed to say whatever he liked. But what the great freethinker was really contending for was no more than the right to the uninhibited expression of opinion, the freedom of trade in ideas; he wasn't thinking about foul language, or obscenities. And it is the free expression of opinion that most people, I think, are concerned about when they say they are in favor of free speech.

In the United States freedom of speech is positively guaranteed by the Constitution. Just what that freedom comprises has been laid down in a number of statutes and judicial decisions that constitute a whole branch of the law; and the same, making allowance for the fact that the English have no written constitution, is true in Great Britain. I am not concerned here with what the law actually is, either in Britain or in the United States. I am going to ask what the law ought to be, in regard to one particular area of human life or human conduct: how far ought the law to allow people freedom not merely to express opinions, but to

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express themselves? I think I detect, in society today, a strong feeling that human beings ought to be guaranteed by law not merely the right to express their opinions freely, but the right to express themselves as they choose, whether as creative artists or writers or in their everyday relations with each other. I should like to suggest that there is a danger that that claim may be pushed too far. Freedom to express oneself is a good thing, but it is a good thing that one can have too much of.

Most of the people who say simply that they are in favor of free speech would probably agree that there must be some limitations upon the freedom they contend for. For instance, everyone, except a professed anarchist, would surely agree that limitations may—indeed, should—be imposed by the civil law upon each citizen's right of free speech in order to protect the private rights of other citizens. The law of slander, the law of libel, and the law of copyright, all of them restrict, in the interests of other individuals, the fundamental right of every individual to say or print whatever he pleases. Restrictions upon this right are also imposed, in the interests of the public at large, by the criminal law. The law, at least the law of Britain, and I suspect the same is true in the United States, makes it a criminal offense to utter or to publish words likely to create a breach of the peace; and, in the field of security, the law makes it a criminal offense to publish in time of peace official secrets or seditious matter and, in time of war, information that is likely to be of assistance to the enemy.

A recent example of encroachment by the criminal law in Britain upon this fundamental freedom is the Race Relations Act passed in 1965. This act made it an offense to publish or distribute, with intent to stir up hatred against certain sections of the public specified in the act, written matter that is insulting and likely to stir up such hatred. To constitute an offense it is not necessary that the publication or distribution should be in a public place, or that it should be likely to cause a breach of the peace.

Most people would agree that all these restrictions upon the fundamental right to speak freely are justifiable on the ground that they help to preserve an orderly and civilized society; and until recently, I think, most people agreed that the law should aim also at preserving public decency, and that, with that end in view, it might impose restrictions not only on behavior, but also on speech and writing. If the law could properly forbid people to do in public things that offend other people's sense of decency, why shouldn't it forbid people publicly to say things, or exhibit things in writing, or for that matter in pictures, that give similar offense? In other words, it was generally accepted that the fundamental right of free speech and free expression is a right that is subject

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to the requirements of public decency just as it is subject to the requirements of public safety and public order.

This generally accepted position is now under attack from several quarters, both as regards speech and as regards other forms of self-expression. On what do the critics or attackers base their attack? To what arguments or principles do they appeal? There are, I think, three main grounds of objection.

First, the critics say that the concepts of obscenity and indecency are not constant, that they vary from place to place and age to age. What is considered indecent or obscene in one part of the world is perfectly acceptable in another; things that shocked our grandfathers, even our fathers, seem quite innocuous to us today. To legislate against the obscene is like trying to legislate against a chameleon by reference to its color.

Second, say the critics, the concepts of obscenity and indecency vary not only from one age and one place to another; there is rarely, if ever, agreement about them even in the same place and time; certainly there is not agreement either in the United States or in Great Britain today about what is obscene or indecent and what is not. Since the concepts are so uncertain in their denotation, it is impossible to frame a satisfactory law to deal with them; for it is a fundamental juridical principle that all laws, especially those to which a criminal sanction is attached, should state clearly and precisely what it is that they forbid.

Finally, the critics' third objection is that it isn't merely that no two people agree—or at any rate most people disagree—about the application of these concepts; the fact is (they say) that no one, no single person, can say what he himself means by them. When a man says "That's indecent" or "That's obscene" he is not indicating an attribute of the thing he refers to, but simply expressing his own reaction to it. To legislate against obscenity, therefore, is not only to legislate against a chameleon, it is to legislate against a chimera, a subjective fantasy.

To each of these three objections I think a satisfactory answer can be given.

The answer to the first objection is very simple. It is perfectly true that the things or the conduct thought or felt to be indecent or obscene differ widely in different countries, different societies, different civilizations, and they vary also from one age, one generation even, to another. But, after all, each society legislates only for itself, and not for other societies, and only for its contemporaries and not for past or future generations. Therefore, provided the law takes account of the opinions and feelings prevailing in the community, and is so drafted that it can be

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adapted as those feelings and opinions change, it does not seem relevant to observe that it would have been inappropriate, or even absurd, to have passed such a law in a society where different feelings prevailed. That is, I think, an obvious and sufficient answer; but one shouldn't dismiss this objector out of hand. His objection may conceal a deeper and more serious criticism.

"I will tell you," he may really be saying, "why the notions of indecency and obscenity are so variable. It is because they are not founded upon reason; they are elements in a structure of conventions built out of, and upon, irrational taboos. Social progress consists in discarding taboos in favor of a rational structure of social rules; any law that bolsters up such conventions is an obstacle to progress." I think this criticism is ill founded. I would question the premise that progress consists in, or depends upon, the discarding of nonrational conventions and taboos; and here, I suspect, I would have the support of social anthropologists, who would surely tell us that civilization is a highly artificial construction, and that to maintain it we must observe conventions that are in part rational and in part nonrational, and that it is impossible, and would be harmful even if it were not impossible, to eliminate the nonrational elements from the complex web of existing social convention. A society of human beings whose actions are governed entirely by rational considerations is hardly a conceivable, let alone an attainable, ideal. Indeed, it is not even a desirable ideal, for it is not true that the nearer we come to achieving it, the better life will be. We ought rather to aim at an appropriate blending of the nonrational and the rational: progress consists in the refinement, not in the elimination, of taboos; society, in short, should have the courage of its conventions. So much for the objection based upon variability and irrationality.

The second objector is more practical in his outlook than the first. "Never mind," he says, "about other countries and other times; forget all a priori objections, based on irrationality and the like; let us assume that we want to legislate against obscenity in this country today. Very well: but how can we frame a satisfactory law? Even if we agree about the concepts of indecency and obscenity in the abstract, there is no agreement, when you come to apply them in practice, about what the things are that they denote: the concepts turn out to be hopelessly vague and ragged at the edges. The writer, the artist, the publisher, the man in the street, all of them, if they are to be made liable to criminal prosecution, are entitled to be told in clear, precise, and definite terms what it is that they may not write or publish or say or do. It is impossible to frame a law against indecency that satisfies this requirement."

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"Clear, precise, and definite terms"—the requirement may seem very reasonable, but it is not quite as simple as it sounds. Clarity, precision, and definiteness are no doubt aims that every legislator sets himself, but it is not always possible for him to achieve them. Clarity is one thing, precision and definiteness (which we may treat as synonymous in this context) are another. Sometimes in a law both are attainable; sometimes precision but not clarity; sometimes clarity but not precision—it all depends upon the subject matter of the legislation. The liability imposed by taxation, for instance, is always precise and definite, but the meaning of a taxation law, as anyone who has had to deal with his own income tax knows, is not always clear; it is often exceedingly—and inevitably—obscure, because the cases that a taxing statute has to deal with are so intricate that they can only be provided for in very complicated and difficult terms. On the other hand, there are large areas in which, owing to the nature of the subject matter, the legislature cannot make rules as exact and precise as those that impose our tax liabilities; it has to forgo definiteness and to lay down a rule couched in clear but general terms, leaving it to a jury (with a judge's guidance) to determine whether in the circumstances of the particular case the defendant's conduct did or did not transgress the rule laid down.

Take the British Road Traffic Acts. They, or regulations made under them, lay down precisely the speed limit to be observed on certain roads and in certain areas; it is a question of fact, the answer to which is ascertainable by reference to a stopwatch, whether or not at any moment a driver is exceeding the relevant limit. He always knows, therefore, or can find out by looking at his speedometer, whether he is breaking the law or not. True enough: but motorists often, without exceeding the speed limit, drive recklessly or dangerously. Obviously it is impossible to define recklessness in an act, or to lay down precisely what shall constitute dangerous driving. The law does not on that account abandon the attempt to legislate against such driving; it simply prohibits dangerous driving, undefined, and leaves it to the jury in each case to say, in the light of the evidence, whether the defendant did or did not drive dangerously.

So, too, with cruelty to children: cruelty cannot be defined in a statute so precisely that a man can say to himself, "The Cruelty to Children Act is clear, precise, and definite: I can hit my child so many blows, of so much force, without transgressing the law; it is only if I exceed the cruelty limit clearly and precisely laid down in the act that I shall be guilty." The legislature does not therefore say—and no one would wish it to say—"Since cruelty cannot be precisely defined, we will not prohi-

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bit it, but will leave it to the good feeling and self-restraint of the public, and of parents in particular, to see to it that children are not subjected to cruel treatment." No, the law prohibits cruelty, and leaves it to a jury of ordinary men and women to say whether in the given case the defendant's conduct is to be considered cruel.

In order to reach a verdict in such cases, a juror must not have regard to what he himself would tolerate or disapprove, he must not ask himself what he would have done in the circumstances; he must put aside any peculiarities or prejudices of his own and decide, as best he can, what a reasonable person would do, or would tolerate, or would disapprove of, in such a case. No doubt it is often difficult to ascertain this standard; and no doubt it is more often difficult, and often more difficult, to do so when you are dealing with indecency than it is in other areas—the borderline cases may be more numerous, partly because the borderline is in that area a shifting one—but the task that confronts the jury is essentially the same. It is important to insist on this, because the critics of anti-indecency legislation often suggest that it imposes on juries an impossible task, and one that they do not have to carry out in cases arising out of legislation in other fields. The fact, then, is that obscenity and indecency, like cruelty, negligence, and recklessness, are concepts that do not lend themselves to precise definition; but it does not follow from this that we should abandon the attempt to legislate against them.

The case presented by the third objector is the most plausible of the three, but it is no better founded than that of the other two. This objector does not concern himself with taboos and conventions, or with the fact that people often disagree about what is indecent and what is not; he takes a slightly different stand: "What you are complaining about," he says, "is nothing more than a personal reaction, and one that you cannot justify or even explain. You say you are shocked. What do you mean by 'shocked'? Weren't you shocked by newspaper reports of what went on in Vietnam? You say you are disgusted. Aren't you disgusted by what you read about the conditions in which the poor are housed in slums? You complain about obscenities in the field of sex: is anything in the whole field of sex as obscene as apartheid in South Africa? You do not press for legislation against reports containing accounts of shocking, disgusting obscenities like these. Even in the field of sex you betray the same inconsistency. A picture shocks you more than a verbal description of the thing depicted. You are not shocked by the idea of copulation in the marriage bed, but you are shocked by the idea of copulation in the street. What exactly is it that you are shocked by, and why is it that you are shocked by it? Perhaps it would do you good," he

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might add, with a touch of self-righteous asperity, "to be exposed to being shocked a bit more often, and then you might stop being shocked by things that in themselves are perfectly innocuous."

To this the complainant might well modestly reply: "Of course I know that all these words—'shocking' and 'horrifying,' 'disgusting' and 'obscene'—are sometimes applied to things quite different from the things I am complaining about. We may say, no doubt, that we are horrified by the news of a railway accident involving heavy loss of life, and that we are shocked when we hear that the bishop has been murdered on the steps of the cathedral; we are disgusted by the government's measures to deal with unemployment, and if we want to convey to a friend our impression of the unpardonable ugliness of a third party, we may, perhaps, apply the word 'obscene' to his or her appearance. The feelings that I am talking about," he might go on to say, "which are experienced by most people with any refinement of sensibility, are quite different from the feelings at work in those examples. I cannot give you a clear and rational account of these feelings of mine, or enumerate the things that evoke them; they differ from indignation and moral disapproval, though they are sometimes accompanied by those emotions. My horror and disgust at actually witnessing an act of physical cruelty, for instance, are distinct from my pity for the victim and my moral disapproval of the act. Shame and disgust are usually evoked by functions of the body—for example, sexual intercourse, excretion, and parturition. These processes seem to be usually associated somehow with shame—the shame that craves privacy, the shame that Adam and Eve felt when they knew that they were naked. These feelings of shame and disgust are evoked—I don't know why—more easily by seeing something than by reading about it, unless the description is visually vivid. They are complex: the emotion felt is often accompanied by a physical reaction—a revulsion stronger than distaste and amounting sometimes to nausea. I know," he might conclude, "that these feelings—which I share, you must remember, with many people of normal sensibility, who are upset in the same way and by the same kinds of things as I am myself—are not rational, and I know that they are difficult, perhaps just because they are not rational, to account for and to classify. But that does not make them any the less genuine, or any the less disagreeable, or any the less deserving of the attention of the law."

That seems to me a more than sufficient answer to the third objection. Let me support it by an illustration. Suppose that a man, in full view and hearing of persons passing by him in the street, exposes his private parts, proceeds, for good measure, to masturbate in public, and,

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having masturbated, to utter a string of four-letter words, and to display a poster with filthy words and pictures printed on it. Surely it is as reasonable that the law should protect the passersby from the third kind of affront (the filthy posters) as from the second (the foul language), and from the second as from the first (the indecent exposure), and surely it is as reasonable that it should protect passersby from any one of these things as it is that it should protect them from actual physical assault. A law that in such a context protects the citizen's person but not his susceptibilities is like a divorce law that recognizes physical but not mental cruelty. And the fact that the complainant, when his susceptibilities are assaulted, cannot define the kinds of things that distress him, or explain why it is that they distress him as they do, affords no reason why the law should not protect him, so far as it can, from being subjected to the distress.

I should therefore look with favor on the idea of passing a law the aim of which was to protect people's sensibilities from being outraged by the impact of things generally felt by ordinary people to be indecent. Of course, the law should not prudishly take account of mild or minor improprieties: whatever its wording, the test should be, in effect, whether the indecent act or thing complained of would be found outrageously offensive by a person of ordinary sensibility. It would be for the court, or jury, in each case to decide whether the limit had been exceeded.

I have spoken of protecting the public, and the examples I have given consisted of acts done in public places. Should the proposed prohibition apply only to things done or things exhibited in public? Many people who are in general opposed to censorship would, I believe, nonetheless approve of a law such as I have suggested, provided its scope was limited to acts publicly performed, or things publicly exhibited. And conversely, many people who strongly support a law forbidding indecency in public would hold that the line should be drawn there. If I may borrow the terminology of Roman Law, they have no objection to the activities of the aedile, whose job it was to preserve decency on the streets; the man they object to is the censor, who claims jurisdiction over art and literature—books, pictures, the theater, and films. They would not mind a law that protected the passerby from having indecencies actually obtruded upon him in public, but further than that they would not go.

They would say, presumably, that it should not be an offense just to publish indecent writings or drawings (or books containing them), or to offer them, whether gratis or for sale, to individual members of the

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public or, indeed, to the public at large; in their view, you should be liable to prosecution only if you actually exhibit them, or the indecent elements in them, in a public place. The bookseller may offer such books for sale in his shop, but he must not display them, open at an indecent passage or illustration, in his window where they may catch the eye of the innocent passerby. So too with indecent theatrical performances and indecent shows (of films, pictures, and the like); provided these don't take place actually in public, no offense, they would say, should be deemed to have been committed, even if members of the public are allowed, or even invited, to view them, whether gratis or on payment of an entrance fee. In such cases, the argument would run, people can't complain that they have had indecency obtruded upon them; they needn't buy the book if it is offered for sale, or accept it if it is offered gratis; they needn't enter the premises where the performance is being given or the exhibition held. Once the aedile begins to turn the pages of a book, or crosses the threshold of premises that are private, he is exceeding his function as aedile and usurping the office of the censor.

I think that this contention takes too narrow a view of the legitimate functions of the aedile, and pushes too far the doctrine *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware); it fails to take account of the facts of life, of the way things actually happen. People, when they buy a book, don't always know, and can't be expected to know, what they will find inside it. Unless the law provides that a publisher must impress a special mark or label on all books likely to outrage generally accepted standards of indecency, and draw attention to indecent passages in otherwise innocent books by a note on the cover or the title page—"outrageous indecencies on pages 7, 26, 141–42, 210–15"—people won't know when they buy a book whether they are going to find indecencies inside it. To say that people who buy a book or a ticket of admission to a theater should have prepared themselves by reading what the critics in the weekly papers had to say about the book, and that if the critics have misled them about a play, they can always walk out of the theater, is not a realistic answer to the problem. No more is it realistic to say to people, if they complain about being confronted by an obscenity on television, "You can always switch the thing off." After all, many people watch television together with the family, and it is no use telling them to switch it off themselves if half the family want to keep it on. And where books are concerned, it is not only the purchaser who has to be considered: once a book is bought, it is liable to fall into the hands of all and sundry—and the person who picks it up and begins to read it unsuspectingly is, to all intents and purposes, in the same position as the

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innocent passerby who finds himself confronted by an obscene picture on a billboard.

On the whole, therefore, I should be in favor of a law prohibiting the presentation of indecencies—I mean, indecencies that could properly be classified as outrageous—not only in public places, but also in books and magazines, and in plays, films, and exhibitions to which the public has access. If it is reasonable that the law should protect people from having thrust upon them, willy-nilly, things that outrage their sensibilities, it seems reasonable that it should likewise protect them from the risk of encountering such things at every turn in their daily life.

Some of the objections in principle that are advanced against legislation prohibiting indecency in books and plays and pictures apply equally to laws directed against indecency in public—the vagueness of the concept, the liability to change, the impossibility of defining it, and so on. I have already dealt with those objections; but there is a special objection that applies only to legislation in the field of art and literature, and to this I now turn.

The law, it is said, should not interfere in the field of books, and plays, and pictures, because art should be above the law: it is monstrous, and it is absurd, to try to subject the creative activities of a painter or a writer, or an artist of any other kind, to the jurisdiction of a lawcourt, giving to a judge or a jury the power of determining, when an artist's work is challenged, what subjects he may treat or depict and what language he may use in order to describe them. It would be equally monstrous, and even more absurd, to attempt to enforce decency by means of a list of prohibited subjects, words, and phrases, set out in a supplementary appendix to the relevant act. Such absurdities, it is said, are the natural and inevitable result of transgressing the fundamental principle that the artist, working in his capacity as an artist, should not be subjected to the laws that regulate the activities of the ordinary citizen; the products of his creative gifts—in a word, art—should be excluded from the scope of any law, or at least from the scope of any law intended to protect society from the impact of indecency.

Of course, one can't help sympathizing with people who put forward a plea like that. Art is, indeed, in a sense, above and beyond the law: acts of Parliament or Congress cannot control the artist's imagination; courts of law cannot compel him positively to write or paint this rather than that; and where the state prevents him from publishing anything that is not acceptable to those in power (as it can do, and as it actually does in totalitarian countries) we feel that there is something

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not only wrong but shameful about the spectacle of "art made tongue-tied by authority."

All this is true; but artists, nonetheless, live in the same world as ordinary men, and if they want to publish their work or to put it into general circulation they can't be exempted, simply on the ground that they are artists, from the laws that regulate society. When I say they can't be exempted, "can't," in this context, is literally true; for if the artist does claim exemption on that ground, he is confronted with an impossibility that is built into his case; the law, he insists, must not be allowed to pronounce upon any alleged indecency in his work, because it is a work of art; the court must not be granted jurisdiction over him, because he is an artist. But what authority is to decide whether he and his work qualify for the claimed exemption? What but the law, operating by means of an act and administered by the courts? It is only by the law that anyone can be exempted from the law. The result of the artist's plea, therefore, if it were acceded to, would simply be to bring in the detested machinery at an earlier stage. And this would surely make matters worse, not better; for it must be even more intolerable for the artist that the law should decide the fundamental question whether he is an artist, than that it should decide the incidental question whether one of his works is outrageously indecent. But to say that the law may not pronounce upon his claim to the status of artist, and still to insist upon his right as an artist to exemption from censorial restrictions, is really to make the claim to be an artist a self-validating claim—if it is put forward it must be admitted—and to do this is tantamount to saying that in order to do justice to the claim of art there should, in the field of books, magazines, films, plays, and pictures, be no restrictive legislation at all, or at any rate none based on grounds of decency or morality.

Many of those who oppose censorship today would, of course, accept this conclusion—and they would not base their acceptance of it upon the view that the artist as such is entitled to any special privilege. Indeed, it is becoming rather old-fashioned nowadays to think of art as a special kind of activity and to regard the artist as a special kind of person, entitled to extraordinary treatment. The line separating what is art from what is not has worn as thin as the lines that used to separate one art from another: "We are all artists now"; and art comprises every kind of happening or object, from the impersonal products of aleatory machines to the crudest results of uninhibited self-expression. Portraits of the artist's mother (*Mère de l'Artiste*) have gone out of fashion—a point nicely made by the organizers of a recent exhibition in Paris, which included an object, under a glass dome, labeled (correctly) *Merde de*

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l'Artiste—evidently a literal exemplification of the thesis that to produce a work of art the artist need do no more than just express himself.

The case, then, against censorial legislation in the field of books and pictures and plays and films must really be based, not upon high-flown appeals to the sacredness of art or to the liberty of the individual, not upon a priori principles, but upon more pragmatic grounds. Society, it is said, loses more than it gains by the imposition of such laws: if you tell people who want to write or to paint or to produce a film or a play that they must not publish or exhibit anything that outrages contemporary sensibilities, you will deprive them of the freedom they need if they are to fulfill themselves as artists and give the world their best work. You not only prevent them from publishing the indecent works at which the prohibitory law is aimed (which may themselves be supreme works of art, and which in a generation or so may no longer be thought to be indecent), but you cramp them, as it were, all round; an artist simply cannot work in fetters.

Therefore (the argument continues) the law should refrain from intruding upon the field of art and literature, not because the artist can claim a specially privileged position, but simply in the interests of society, which is enriched by the things that the artist produces and correspondingly impoverished if he is not allowed to produce them. On this view, in order to assure to creative writers the freedom that they need, we ought to put up with the unrestricted publication of indecent, obscene, and pornographic matter: whatever benefit may result from suppressing it, society will on balance, it is claimed, be a loser.

To adjudicate upon this claim, one would have to weigh the loss to the world of literature and art that would result from the prohibition of grossly indecent works against the damage that would be inflicted on society if no restriction were placed upon them. Under a system of censorship, literature perhaps would suffer: some writers and painters might feel inhibited, some masterpieces might remain unwritten, or might have to wait for publication (like Joyce's *Ulysses*) until prevailing standards changed. Against that one must set the suffering that would be inflicted upon individual sensibilities, and the damage that would be done to society at large, by removing all control over the publication of indecency, obscenity, and pornography. That damage is of two kinds. Over and above the outrage inflicted upon the sensibilities of ordinary people—to protect which should, I suggest, be the primary aim of censorial legislation—there is the positive influence for bad that the publication of indecent books and films may have upon those who read or see them. Since the possibility of such influence is often denied by

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opponents of censorship, I must explain carefully what I mean by it.

I should have thought that it went without saying that we may be influenced—particularly when we are young, but also after we have grown up—by things we read or see. Sometimes we are conscious of this influence, sometimes not; it operates in varying degrees, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. To be specific, it seems to me undeniable that, if we have read a book or poem or have seen a play or a film, our attitude toward life may be altered by what we have read or seen—may be different from what it would have been if we had not read that book or poem, or seen that play or film. And what we read or see may affect not only our character but also our conduct: we may actually be impelled to go and do something that we saw enacted on the screen or read about in a book. The influence may be deep and lasting, or it may be trivial and temporary; it may be for the better, or it may be for the worse. A poem or a play may be either degrading or exalting in its effect; but that poems and plays do influence people's lives and conduct is, I should think, undeniable.

Of course, it is impossible to prove the truth of this proposition or to support it by precise statistics, either generally or in relation to a particular work. The same book or picture may leave some people unaffected, and may affect one person in one way, another in another; we can't say, therefore, that a particular film, for instance, will have a good or bad influence upon all the people who see it, or even upon an ascertainable proportion of them; nor can we say in advance that it will have a good or bad influence upon any particular person; nor, after a particular person has seen the film, can we gauge mathematically the extent of its influence upon him. And even if it does appear pretty plainly that a person was impelled to do something by, say, a film that he had seen—if, for instance (and this was a real case), a youth batters an old tramp to death or rapes a girl shortly after having seen a similar incident enacted in *A Clockwork Orange*—it is always possible to say that it was a coincidence: you can't prove that he wouldn't have battered the old tramp to death or raped the girl even if he hadn't seen the film. Even if he himself says, "It was seeing the film that made me do it," he may be self-deceived, or he may be seeking to transfer to others the responsibility for his act.

Now this general proposition, that things we read or see may exercise an influence upon us, does not seem to me to be invalidated in the very least by our inability to offer a scientific proof of its truth, either generally or in relation to a particular work, or by our inability to support it by statistical evidence. To ask for scientific proof or statistical demonstration in such a case sounds, no doubt, impressive—it sounds as if the

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person asking for such proof was himself being scientific, when in fact his attitude and his approach are not scientific but the reverse; he is asking for a kind of proof which, from the nature of the case, it is impossible to supply.

If one person is in love with another, his emotion will surely influence his attitude, his judgment, and his actions in relation to that person. It would be foolish (and, indeed, unscientific) to ask for a scientific definition of love or for a demonstration of the truth of the proposition that it influences people as I have suggested. And it would be wrong to say that the impossibility of providing such a demonstration and supporting it by statistical evidence shows that people are not really influenced in their relations with other people by their feelings for them.

Besides the direct influence of the unrestricted exhibition of indecent or obscene or sadistic art, we must consider also the indirect results. If one wants to get a fair idea of what those indirect results would be, one must take into account not only their impact upon those who actually read the books or see the films that contain them, but the effect that would be wrought upon people generally by the unrestricted publication and presentation of such things and the knowledge that their presentation and publication was permitted by law. In making one's estimate of that effect, one has to rely on one's sense of how people's views are influenced, largely without their being aware of it, by what goes on around them, by the atmosphere of the society they live in.

I should say that the unrestricted circulation in the bookshops and on the bookstalls of grossly indecent and sadistic books and magazines, and the unrestricted presentation in theaters and cinemas of grossly indecent and sadistic films and live performances, coupled with the knowledge that these things are permitted by the law of the land, would make a difference in the way the general public regards the indecent and the inhumane, particularly in the area of sex and violence. People would unconsciously redefine these concepts, and alter their attitude toward the things they stand for: accepted standards of decency and humanity would themselves be modified; things that today disgust us by their indecency would no longer seem indecent, things that today horrify us by their brutality would no longer seem brutal, or not so shockingly brutal as they do now. Life would, in these respects, undergo a gradual metamorphosis.

I say "a gradual metamorphosis," but I don't think that the process would be likely to be a slow one: people's attitudes and opinions on social questions nowadays change ever more swiftly, and nowhere more swiftly, it seems, than in this very field. If one wants to appreciate how

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rapid and how radical the change can be, one has only to switch on the television, or turn the pages of a newspaper, or visit a theater or a cinema. Things are described, language is used, scenes are depicted or enacted, that couldn't conceivably have found a place in print or on the screen or stage twenty, ten, or even half-a-dozen years ago. There are, for instance, films that shock the ordinarily sensitive person (although they may delight others) by their representation of cruelty or violence—films like *A Clockwork Orange, Straw Dogs, The Devils,* or *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (which was, in effect, a reenactment of the killing of Sharon Tate and her friends). Other films contain scenes of castration or coprophilia, or vivid presentations of sexual intercourse, normal or perverse.

I am not at the moment concerned with the question whether the change is for the better or for the worse: I merely draw attention to the pace at which it is taking place. Here I should perhaps repeat that, although I believe that seeing obscenities in books or films may affect a person's character and conduct, and will certainly affect his attitude toward obscenity generally, that is not my primary reason for thinking that their publication should be subject to control by law. What I propose is that publication of obscenities should be prohibited in cases where it would transgress accepted standards of decency and humanity, and so outrage people's sensibilities; and it is the outrage done to people's sensibilities, not the effect it would have upon their characters or their behavior, that affords, in my opinion, the primary reason for holding that their publication should be restrained by law.

I should like to conclude by touching upon a question that goes a little deeper—a question not so much for the lawyer as for the social anthropologist or the psychologist. The claim that the law should not intervene in the field of indecency is put forward, not, of course, by or on behalf of the decadent, the dissolute, the prurient, the pornographer—although they may be its incidental and illegitimate beneficiaries. No, it is put forward by intellectuals and the avant-garde, to vindicate the right of the individual to express himself without interference or inhibition. What is the impulse, the motive force, behind this individualistic pressure? It is a claim for a kind of liberty—the liberty to say what you like, freedom of speech. But it is in no sense political, although it is seized on and turned to their own purposes by social revolutionaries, like Herbert Marcuse, who recommends the methodical use of obscenities as a revolutionary tool or weapon: to shock the Establishment is one way of shaking the Establishment. The craving for liberty of self-expression is—surely?—the result of a deep dissatisfaction with the existing social and economic

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order: people want to assert the claim of the individual in a world of combines and corporations, to vindicate the virtues of nature in a world of conventions and constraints, to do justice to those who wish, in a world of universal competition, not to surpass others, but simply to be themselves.

Of course, one sympathizes with those who are moved by such feelings: civilized society exists for the individual—we can't remind ourselves of that too often in an age when the state has grown top-heavy, and seems to crush all individual effort, all individual character, to leave us little room to fulfill ourselves. No wonder there exists today an almost desperate craving for self-expression. But, after all, society is pluralistic: each individual must respect the individuality of his fellow citizens; he must exercise self-restraint, out of respect not only for the rights but for the feelings of his fellow men; self-expression is not self-validating, and affords no sovereign plea in defense of those whose conduct collides with the common feelings and susceptibilities of mankind.

Retardation Center

FRANK MANLEY

There in that place where each one is different,
Strange as God made us, the blind and deaf
Grope at the world, or hang in a hug forever.
Smiles and tears are ready as feet to run.
Floors and walls are there to bounce off,
And demons appear in the middle of day.
There are minds so deep, so sunk
In their bodies, the flesh folds over
And ingrows itself to a sort of laugh
Feeling food, its texture and smell.
This is the place where those end up
Who were born with their souls for a body.
They are what they are.

FRANK MANLEY is a professor of English Renaissance literature at Emory University. He has recently edited an edition of Saint Thomas More's *Dialogue of Comfort*.

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The Limits of Ethnicity

HOWARD F. STEIN AND ROBERT F. HILL

EVERY AGE HAS ITS COMPELLING IMAGE OR METAPHOR, by which it seeks to understand and organize itself. There have been the Age of Faith and the Age of Reason, and more recently the Age of Anxiety, the Atomic Age, and the Age of Aquarius. Many would contend today that we in the United States are in the Age of Pluralism—an age dominated by the irresistible dictates of an ethnic imperative. Pluralism and ethnicity seem inextricably enmeshed, and the vanguard of the new Age of Pluralism is composed of such white ethnic intellectuals and activists as Michael Novak, Geno Baroni, Andrew Greeley, Richard Gambino, Irving Levine, and Richard Kolm, among others. Since pluralism of the kind these men advocate promises to alter American life for the better, it is worth inquiring into its premises and attending to what it forebodes for the future.

Napoleon remarked that history is destiny; today the advocates of the New Pluralism argue that ethnicity is destiny. Their argument runs roughly as follows: An ethnic imperative, an ineffable bond that Professor Harold Isaacs terms "basic group identity," governs our lives and is the taproot of our authentic identities. This ethnic bond is primordial, molding us from our earliest hours. So pervasive is it that, because of it, selfhood is finally inseparable from group; even values such as individuality, strong though they might seem, are imposed from without upon the far more natural ethnic identity. America is thus a pluralistic society composed of discrete ethnic groups, and not at all what the myth of the melting pot would have us believe. No limits, finally, can be set to the empire of ethnicity; it is part and parcel of one's self and soul, a heritage one carries through life, imparted from the cradle if not indeed the genes.

Ethnic pluralism, the argument continues, is intrinsic to the human condition. Moreover, if ethnicity is not intrinsic, then it ought to be; and

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even now the hard sell is on to reeducate Americans to bow to the inevitable and embrace their true ethnic selves. The New Pluralism is thus held to express what is ineradicable in human nature and is, at the same time, designed to help bring about what is assumed already to exist. On the one hand, it is impossible to lose one's ethnic soul because it is of the essence of one's self; on the other hand, it is precisely this essence that many advocates of the New Pluralism claim has been forcibly eradicated from their lives by that demonic figure, the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. But let us momentarily set aside such outright contradictions of the New Pluralism, and attempt instead to discover wherein its appeal lies.

This appeal is not difficult to fathom. It chiefly lies in the instant identity it confers, offering ready-made and prepackaged a full-blown ethnic identity for the asking. Whereas one's ethnic origins might once have been a source of shame, that shame has now become, under the cult of ethnicity, transfigured into a radiant pride. One who might only recently have felt himself a lowly "Hunkie" is in the new superimposed reality of ethnicity an heir to the royalty of the Great Moravian Empire, or to Saints Cyril and Methodius, who brought Christianity to central Europe. A new sense of history thus radically modifies history itself. One becomes somebody by dint of being related to someone else. By association with one's ethnic group, one steps out of the anonymity of the lonely crowd. Ethnicity becomes a birthright, an inheritance; under its beneficence one has neither to do nor achieve anything in order to be absolutely certain who one is. However paralyzingly uncertain the future may be, one's imagined ethnic past is secure. In an age much given to talk of rootlessness, great comfort is found in that.

This new enthusiasm for ethnicity has risen almost in exact proportion as belief in the American dream has declined. Where once pride was to be found in having joined American life in its mainstream—in fact to have joined in the majority culture was a mark of success—today something like the reverse obtains. The background to this, it ought never to be forgotten, is a history of shame; in the early 1900s, Italians, Slavs, Jews, and other recent immigrants were regarded as members of inferior "races." Yet now it is the WASP who is held to be inferior, the majority culture that is to be shunned. In the foreword to our forthcoming book *The Ethnic Imperative* Weston LaBarre writes:

> One may asseverate, out of self-doubt, that "minority is beautiful." Or, like monks contesting that "I am more humble than you are," one may argue that "We're more a minority than you are" . . . or even "We're a bigger minority (i.e., an even smaller one) than you are"—but in either way through perverse

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one-downmanship make minority into superiority solely because it is not a majority!

What was once a badge of shame—one's ethnic background—has now become not merely a source of pride but often a weapon of haughtiness. In the United States nowadays everything but WASP is beautiful.

While the ethnic pluralists conduct elaborate archaeological digs for a usable past, much of the truth of their history has in the meanwhile been buried. Those whom Oscar Handlin spoke of as "the uprooted" were, after all, as much uprooted by choice because of their personal search for freedom in the New World that was no longer (if ever) available in the old. The very past that is now so easily idealized in ethnic studies curricula, in museums, in conversation, is one which those who now so elaborately venerate it did not have the luxury of experiencing. The reason they did not, more often than not, is that either political or economic catastrophe drove their immigrant parents to this shore.

Why is this rather obvious fact overlooked in the glorified ethnic accounts of the past? Why is what is in effect a historical lie necessary? It is necessary once one understands that the current passion for ethnicity is itself part of the more general quest among us in America for roots, community, order, for the mystifications and longings and hunger that travel under the banner of "identity." What the New Pluralism shares with other such movements—many of them at bottom therapeutic in what they do for their adherents—is the attempt to blur the hard edges of historical reality with the gauzy lens of nostalgia.

Those who ten or fifteen years ago were in the vanguard of social change or intellectual discussion have suddenly turned up as the spokesmen for the people, or (more precisely) for their own people or ethnic group. Thus among the New Pluralists we have been treated to the spectacle of men who were once integrationists, assimilationists, radicals, universalists turned inward in their interests. Monsignor Geno Baroni, currently the leading political organizer of the White Ethnic Movement, has said that the assassination of Robert Kennedy in 1968 was the event that turned him from his earlier role as a civil rights activist to the rediscovery of his Italian ethnicity.

Perhaps better known than Geno Baroni is Father Andrew Greeley, Catholic priest, prolific sociologist, and director of the National Opinion Research Center. Father Greeley's position as a New Pluralist is not altogether clear, in large part because he appears to occupy several positions, sometimes serially, sometimes simultaneously. For the most part, though, through statistical demonstration he argues that the Irish

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Americans and the white American ethnics generally have enjoyed a splendid success economically, occupationally, and educationally in the United States, while at the same time he mourns the passing of the Irish soul. In an essay entitled "The Ethnic Miracle" in the fall 1976 issue of the *Public Interest*, Father Greeley wrote: "The ethnics have made it. Ethnicity is not a way of looking back to the Old World. Most of the immigrants were only too happy to get the hell out. Ethnicity is rather a way of being American, a way of defining yourself into the pluralistic culture which existed before you arrived."

This, though, is a far cry from an earlier version of Father Greeley's pluralist vision. In his book *That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish*, for example, Father Greeley laments that the wildness has been deculturated out of the Irish in America, who are now affluent, thoroughly assimilated, and, alas, unremarkably ordinary Americans. For Andrew Greeley the new passion for ethnicity came too late for the Irish, who in effect lost their ethno-Catholic souls while gaining this world. The primordial essence of men, he argues in *Why Can't They Be Like Us?*, lies in ties to "land," "religion," and "blood." Greeley never asks why someone would wish to surmount his primordial inheritance.

For Andrew Greeley the American experience has provided both an opportunity and a threat. From his more strictly ethnic point of view, to succeed in America has been to fail, and vice versa. Ethnicity, like religious faith, has persisted even though it has waned. To the extent that the ethnics have resisted efforts at Americanization and secularization—to that extent are they to be applauded. But then Greeley does not want to demean everything the ethnics have gained in America. Instead he has it both ways: he embraces the common American culture at the same time that he faults it with detribalization and desacralization. In two of his other books—*Unsecular Man* (1973) and *Ecstasy: A Way of Knowing* (1974)—he pursues his religious quest of the sacred that elsewhere finds expression in his quest for community that is represented in ethnicity.

Unlike Michael Novak, from whom he explicitly distinguishes himself, Andrew Greeley is guided by reason, the scientific method, and a cognitive rather than affective orientation toward the world. Thus in Greeley there is something of a Cartesian split between knowledge and affect, thinking and feeling. He takes heart in the universality of religion and in its current resurgence; yet at the same time he is encumbered by doubt about the validity of the very experiences he appears to seek.

Michael Novak, who is perhaps the leading prophet of the New

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Pluralism, seems to be unfettered by rationalism, science, and the victories of the Enlightenment. His is primarily a religious imagination, where myth holds sway. In his own writings Novak appears more comfortable in writing about feelings than in expressing them. He is more insistent, too, on his preference for heart over head than is Andrew Greeley and far more contemptuous of WASP culture. Novak would like to transform American culture for "his" ethnics, while Greeley takes some measure of satisfaction from the gains "his" ethnics have made in America. Novak is—or at least often acts as if he were—the outspoken leader of a major American social movement. Greeley sees neither the need for such a movement nor indeed the existence of it: "the militant ethnic . . . is almost entirely a fiction of the imagination of liberals and leftists in the media and the academy," he writes.

A former Catholic seminarian, then a radical and existential nihilist, Michael Novak makes his major statements about the New Pluralism in his book *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*. Novak seeks to transform the American spirit by ethnicizing and catholicizing it. His is a mind obsessed by religious symbol, from which even his recent book on sports, *The Joy of Sports*, does not go unencumbered. He sees in the United States president not a secular leader but a "vicar of the people." For him the Enlightenment, if not already dead, deserves to die—to be replaced by the diversity of stories of ethnic peoples that cannot be translated into the conventional language of WASP culture. In the pages of Michael Novak the image of the WASP carries something of the same ring as it did in the speech of Malcolm X. The price of being Americanized, for Novak, is the passive loss of one's ethnic soul, in an action approximating cultural rape.

Largely under Michael Novak's direction, the Ethnic Millions Political Action Committee was formed in 1974. Although in his role as writer and as ethnic leader Novak speaks of reconciliation among all groups in America, an element of anger, a hunger for revenge for past and present humiliations, echoes in his voice. For Michael Novak as for others the claims of the New Pluralists cannot stand alone; the ethnics need, in fact, to define themselves by opposition to their permanent adversaries, liberal Jews and WASPs above and blacks below. Those who define themselves ethnically do so most conspicuously in terms of who they are not. But the real question is whither will all this lead: to a healthy reintegration of American society, as the New Pluralists claim, or to an ideology of exclusivism, a Balkanization of American life, and further divisions among people?

The intellectual spokesmen for the New Pluralism insist that neither

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the ideal of the American Dream nor the metaphor of the melting pot has justly portrayed American culture. On the contrary. In their view American culture has always been pluralistic—a multi-ethnic and even a multilingual culture. Americanization was never actually sought but rather was foisted on immigrants by dint of cultural imperialism. America, then, is not merely a nation of immigrants but, more important, it is a nation of nations—of people who clearly wish to remain members of their respective national groupings. Such at least are the major lineaments of American history as understood by ethnic intellectuals. Not that this view of history everywhere finds a response among white ethnics who are not intellectuals, so many of whom looked to America as a place where they would be emancipated from the political turbulence and economic impasse of their parents' native countries. In the homes of working-class white ethnics a not uncommon sight is something akin to an icon or shrine composed of rosary, crucifix, portrait of John F. Kennedy, madonna, and American flag. Upon seeing this, one takes away a distinctly different view of the way that white ethnics view their own and American history. Listen to enough white ethnics of the second and even third generation talk in their neighborhood clubs—the AMVETS, the Slovak Club, the Polish Falcons—and one realizes the extent to which, for such men and woman, America is not merely a place but an identity.

The New Pluralists have supplanted the metaphor of the melting pot with that of a maplike mosaic, composed of ethnic islands each bounded by the safety and comforts of the familiar. Each piece, as the mosaic is construed by the ethnic intellectuals, is a piece of the great American whole. As in the metaphor, so in life itself: the Poles will live here, the Italians here, the Greeks here, the Slovaks here, the Irish here, each happily unto itself, worshiping in its own churches, celebrating its own special customs, governed by its own special cultural mores, marrying among its own and bringing up its children with a clear sense of historical antecedents. If the New Pluralism can be said to have a vision, then it is one of the comforts to be found among those with whom one is culturally most compatible; happiness, in this vision, is finding one's place among one's own.

None of its spokesmen has dared to think of the New Pluralism in its collective form as advocating a policy of "separate but equal," an idea that has had a justly dreadful press in this country. Yet is not "separate but equal" the logical extension, the unspoken consequence, of the New Pluralism? Under the New Pluralism, of course, no one need speak of racial segregation, but instead one can speak, more palatably, of ethnic resegmentation in culturally homogeneous neighborhoods in which,

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surely, no outsider would wish to live. Implicitly, integration can have no attraction under the New Pluralism. White ethnic groups need not therefore be concerned about excluding blacks from their midst; blacks, after all, as a separate ethnic group are held to be most content living among their own kind and can have no reason to want to live in a cultural environment that is alien. Exclusion is not really necessary where self-exclusion is the rule.

Thus does the New Pluralism not so much do away with the problems connected with race in American life as turn away from them. Since each person's primordial ethnic ties supersede all other values, social problems having to do with race or social injustice automatically disappear; or at least under the New Pluralism they do. White ethnics can, for example, claim to have immigrated to a country that was already thoroughly racist when they arrived; and, this being the case, the problem of race in America therefore becomes a problem for the descendants of WASPs.

Under the New Pluralism the basis for social conscience is altered. If one's loyalties are essentially to one's ethnic group, ultimately one's responsibilities are too. The concern with social justice, conscience, guilt—whatever it is that makes men act beyond the sphere of their narrow self-interest—becomes attenuated. The inherent logic of the New Pluralism allows one to say (in effect) to all that does not directly touch one's own group, "This doesn't involve us." To return to race, self-interest can receive fortification from history: "My ancestors were serfs to the Hungarians and after that to the Ottoman Turks longer than yours were slaves." This is the unspoken political component of the New Pluralism: the retreat to localism in all things political, whose only moral imperative is to look after one's own.

To look after one's own seems fair enough, but what does not seem fair at all, or even healthy, about the New Pluralism is the fear of contamination of one's own group by alien elements or, for that matter, the fear of dilution of one's group's homogeneity. A strong strain of the xenophobic runs through the New Pluralism. The phrase "ethnic purity" nearly cost Jimmy Carter a presidency; perhaps the reason was that nearly everyone recognized an element of bitter, if not yet openly acknowledged, xenophobia that is the ugly truth buried beneath the phrase. Paradoxically, although the New Pluralism trades off older notions of pluralism, it is not only quite different from them, but in most significant respects violates the values of traditional pluralism. The New Pluralism claims to esteem and indeed cherish difference, observing, as its spokesmen do, that cultural diversity is intrinsic to the health of any

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society. Yet the New Pluralism everywhere undermines the fulfillment of traditional pluralism by its emphasis on boundaries, on a stringent separatism, whose cumulative effect has been to militate against the idea of an America of social fluidity. The traditional pluralism respected differences among groups but did not idolize these differences. Difference, for the New Pluralism, is not merely to be respected but is viewed as decisive.

Yet finally, how decisive can the element of ethnicity be in the lives of those, now second- and third-generation Americans, who cling to it? So much of the talk of the attraction of their ethnicity has the ring of abstract idealization about it. In conversation one only rarely hears talk of a real father or mother but, instead, of a dimly remembered strong grandparent or of the idyllic life in the *shtetl* or of the hard but rewarding peasant life in Eastern Europe or Southern Italy or of the soul food of plantation days. But how deep do such things really go? Can they have any but the most superficial meaning when wrenched from their actual contexts, in which, in every instance, religion was at the center? Why now this rush to dig for ethnic roots?

Beyond a certain justifiable pride in what one's ancestors have survived, what is the true point of the emphasis of recent years on ethnic origins? Part of the point would seem to be to absolve oneself from the burdens of American history. After all, to insist on the homogeneity of one's ethnic community, of one's continuity with the past, of the purity of one's identity is to let oneself gently off the hook for almost everything that has gone awry in the United States in recent years. From this point of view the retreat into the ethnic carries the added reward of dissociation of oneself from all that is pejoratively American.

But on another, deeper level the New Pluralism pretends to be a form of social psychiatry. It promises to heal the wounds and humiliations of the past through the fierce ethnic pride of the present: the invention of the acronym PIGS by New Pluralist intellectuals to designate Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs, thereby throwing what was once a stigma back into the teeth of former adversaries, is but a single example. More than this, though, the New Pluralism promises, for those in a position to join forces with it, to cure the yearning, the fear, the sense of emptiness that have been the general lot of modern man since the loss of religious feeling. The New Pluralism will accomplish this, presumably, by buoying up its adherents through an intensified sense of community, of group security, of connection with the past, and of self-esteem. Whatever the comforts of ethnicity, it scarcely seems possible that surcease from the unanchored condition of modern man—the condition described by Dos-

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toevsky and analyzed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche—can be among them. Here the New Pluralism, whatever its promises, can be no more than the latest in a long series of placebos.

The shame of discrimination visited upon the parents as well as upon many of the current generation who have embraced the New Pluralism has been very real and ought never to be minimized. But neither can their experience in America be justly reduced to these grievances alone. Any so obviously single-faceted view of historical experience is best met with distrust. In the same way, distrust seems the best response to the rush of the New Pluralism to embrace fresh stereotypes for resurgent ethnic groups. Positive or negative, group stereotyping has not had a very happy history anywhere. Simply to say one is black or Irish or Polish or Italian or Jewish is, granted, to say something important, but not by any means what is most important, about any human being. It was William Blake who implored us to view nature—human nature included—in its "minute particulars." Then as now, this remains the best advice.

They Carved an Animal

WILLIAM STAFFORD

In a cave somewhere they carved an animal
jumping: that leap stayed. Across the world
in other caves a light gleamed, once.

I stand on a porch under the rain,
and somewhere, you on yours—the rest
of the world leans out, an animal stilled.

There's a leap that lasts in every cave,
but things go on: lights pull into the stars,
a forest springs, I hear the rain.

I touch old boards.

● WILLIAM STAFFORD teaches literature at Lewis and Clark College. A new collection of his poems is scheduled for publication this year.

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Voyeurs

DANIEL HOFFMAN

Veronese's flesh
tones bring
out the pink of her
bubs, her
heavy waist, her thick
behind, as
she poises playfully
crotch-deep
in the dark pool,
her handmaidens
splashing on rocks. On
trees are none
of their gauzy robes
or underthings,
so we must conjecture
that they romped
pink and naked through
dappled light
fallen from trees, and what
more natural
for the huntsman after
his hounds who track
the doe, on raising this
scent of her,
to follow where she leads
with her naked
maidens and to peer
through slots between
the trees' arms laden
with rustling leaves?
His head is tilted back
now, the sudden

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weight of unaccustomed
antlers pulls
him down, his body still
in shirt and codpiece,
the yapping hounds who swarm
about his knees
haven't caught the new
scent he breathes
yet—in a moment
they will sniff
his heady musk and start him
crashing through
the brush while gaily she
steps on mossy
rocks and strokes the water
from her nape,
her arms, her rump, her breasts
and belly glowing
in the rosy Tuscan
light by which
we gaze between the branches
heedless of what
will in a moment happen
or of the hounds
thrusting at our thighs.

● DANIEL HOFFMAN's most recent book of verse is *The Center of Attention*. His selected poems, *Able Was I ere I Saw Elba*, will be published in England this spring. He is professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, and in 1973–74 was Consultant in Poetry for the Library of Congress.

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The Lamps

MARY OLIVER

Eight o'clock, no later,
You light the lamps,

The big one by the large window,
The small one on your desk.

They are not to see by—
It is still twilight out over the sand,

The scrub oaks and cranberries.
Even the small birds have not settled

For sleep yet, out of the reach
Of prowling foxes. No,

You light the lamps because
You are alone in your small house

And the wicks sputtering gold
Are like two visitors with good stories

They will tell slowly, in soft voices,
While the air outside turns quietly

A grainy and luminous blue.
You wish it would never change—

But of course the darkness keeps
Its appointment: each evening,

An inscrutable presence, it has the final word
Outside every door.

● MARY OLIVER has recently completed her third book, *The Night Traveler and Other Poems*.

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The Tyranny of Harmony

JOHN P. SISK

"FROM HARMONY, from heav'nly harmony, / This universal frame began," John Dryden begins his "Song for St. Cecelia's Day," and thereby identifies himself with one of the great commonplaces of Western civilization. From classical times, perhaps from the Pythagoreans' reputed discovery of the mathematical order of stringed instruments, says musicologist Gretchen Ludke Finney, "audible music was an image of higher kinds of harmony, that of the soul and body of man or of cosmic order." So it came to be widely believed that "if the basic principles of music were discovered . . . all things in the universe might be understood." Music was included in the medieval quadrivium of liberal arts because of the conviction that the "basis of all harmony in macrocosm and microcosm alike is mathematical." The English magi John Dee and Robert Fludd shared this conviction. Fludd's music theory, as Frances A. Yates points out in *Theatre of the World*, was part of his effort to be a universal man of the Renaissance. Writing in his *Macrocosm* of the "harmony and symphony" of the constituent elements of the universe, Fludd remarks: "The whole universe must perish and be reduced to nothing in warring discord should these consonances fail or be corrupted."

Until well into the seventeenth century a sizable majority of thinking people believed in the music of the spheres, although Aristotle thought that the sound, if it existed, would shatter human ears and Rabelais suggests somewhere that it is most likely to be heard when one is drunk. Johannes Kepler, despite the fact that he was a Copernican, continued to believe, says Professor Finney, "that mathematical harmony in celestial order is analogous to that in heard music." Shakespeare is no more able than the Renaissance Platonists to talk about soul, universe, virtue, or love without using the metaphor of music or its variant, the dance. In his great "degree" speech in *Troilus and Cressida*, for instance, Ulysses cannot think of the cosmos apart from the model of a stringed instrument: "Take but degree away, untune that string, / And, hark! what discord follows." For Iago, the still happily married Othello and Desde-

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mona "are well tun'd now," though he immediately vows: "But I'll set down the pegs that make this music." Ophelia, changing the instrument but not the metaphor, says of the apparently mad Hamlet: "Now see that noble and most sovereign reason, / Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh." The comedies and romances are in love with music and in them music is love, perhaps nowhere more memorably than in Lorenzo's great speeches to Jessica in act 5 of *The Merchant of Venice*. There the problem of the music of the spheres is settled, perhaps in a way that would have satisfied Aristotle, when Lorenzo says of the harmony that is in immortal souls: "But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay / Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

In such a tradition it is obvious that the experience of harmony in music serves a practical purpose and that all ideal states of affairs are assumed to be harmonious. To be sure, the distinction between music as a divine and as a diabolic art appears early in the history of our culture. Music, like the dance, may be seen as catering to sensual lust and vanity, as it was by Saint Augustine and John Calvin (who might have remembered that the devil played the harp before Saul), or as dangerous to one's revolutionary determination, as Lenin once told Maxim Gorky. In general, however, as Walter Jackson Bate has pointed out, the reigning position in Western civilization has been that of Plato's *Republic:* music is to be valued because of its "ethical inculcation of order, measure and harmony." For Socrates a proper education required "gymnastics for the body and music for the soul," while for Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, music "is to be studied for the sake of many benefits." Shakespeare's Lorenzo puts it as well as anyone:

> The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.

The editors of *Rolling Stone* really had not gotten beyond this position when in their one-hundredth edition they announced that "music is central to our time and that the great musicians are, in this culture more than in any other in recent times, the true shamans, the religious and secular spokesmen, the educators and the poets." They had simply taken their stand on a kind of music that *The Republic* would probably have classified as Ionian: "soft and fit for a drinking party."

"By mid-seventeenth century," Professor Finney writes, "ideas of harmony imaged in music, and of the power of music to exert divine influence," had, with rare exceptions, lost both actual and symbolic significance. Readers of *Crawdaddy* and *Rolling Stone* might quarrel

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with that "rare," but she is no doubt right. When Samuel Pepys "remained all night transported" after hearing the wind music of *The Virgin Martyrs*, he was no more concerned with the music of the spheres than he was in that famous dream of his in which Lady Castlemayne permitted him "to use all the dalliance I desired with her." Even Dryden's poem is a long way from the Renaissance Neoplatonists, and Alexander Pope's harmonious deistic cosmos, in which all discord is "Harmony not understood," is still further. When, in his last days, the dejected anarchist Mikhail Bakunin said to a friend that everything except Beethoven's Ninth would pass away, he had lost all hope in music as a means of inculcating order, measure, and harmony. By the time we arrive at Meredith Wilson's *Music Man*, the grand cosmic symphony has very nearly been secularized out of existence. This is one reason why poets like William Butler Yeats and T. S. Eliot, whose use of the metaphor of the dance has a metaphysical resonance ("Sailing to Byzantium" and the *Four Quartets*, for instance), can sound so old-fashioned to modern readers.

This is not the same thing, however, as saying that music as heuristic and synergistic model has ceased to be important in our culture. Yet what is more likely to compel us now is the tradition of metaphoric, not literal, music, in which the work of art is seen as ideally expressive of the harmonious interdependence of parts in a whole to which they are subordinated and which is always greater than their sum. Plato's *Republic* is imagined as a harmonious work of art in which interrelated human components are subordinated to the communal theme they help express, though with a respect for humanistic values missing in later totalitarian systems. The despotic states of Renaissance Italy, says Jacob Burckhardt, represented a new fact in European history: "the State as the outcome of reflection and calculation, the State as a work of art"—which might indeed display "the worst features of an unbridled egotism," since it was always likely that the imperial ego of the political "artist" would tolerate nothing that threatened the aesthetic finish of his artifact.

Shakespeare himself lived in a world that had for long conceived of the cosmos as God's plenitudinous work of art, hierarchically structured and defined by the principles of variety and contrast so that it was the proper model for the human work of art. Such a theme rules Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, a work Shakespeare would have known in Sir Thomas North's great translation. "Thus just as in the heavens the sun, the moon and the stars exhibit to the world, as if in a mirror, a certain likeness of God," says signor Ottaviano, "so on earth a far truer image of God is provided by those good rulers who love and reverence

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Him and display to their people the resplendent light of His justice accompanied by a semblance of the divine reason and intellect." In a similar manner the harmonious plan of the cosmos was repeated in the Elizabethan theater, as it had been in ancient Vitruvian theater, so that, as Frances Yates says, it was a true " 'Theatre of the World' in which Man, the Microcosm, was to play his parts within the Macrocosm." Thus the aesthetic of heavenly harmony filters down to the human work of art.

II

But in Shakespeare, as in Dante, man the microcosm is not overwhelmed by the grand harmony that moves the sun and the other stars in their dance. Thus in *The Tempest*, a play in which both literal and metaphoric music are crucial, Duke Prospero for all his magical power must settle for a qualified harmony. Antonio, his usurper-brother, is one of his failures. The former, Frank Kermode remarks, "will not choose the good; unlike Sebastian, he is unimpressed by it, and refuses to close the circle of noble virtue which excludes only Caliban." Prospero "must acknowledge another thing of darkness." By implication he must acknowledge too that "A world without Antonio is a world without freedom."

Shakespeare's artistry is of course superior to Prospero's, for he makes the jangles of Antonio and Caliban serve the sweet bells of his higher harmony. One might say that there is a tension between the aesthetic assertion of the play and the theological and moral system it endorses, and that insofar as it is successful the tension will be resolved in favor of the aesthetic assertion: in some sense moral and theological systems, like everything else in the play, will be subordinated to the needs of a corporate whole. This is the necessary tyranny of its harmony. Such a corporate state of affairs is presented starkly by Henry St. John Bolingbroke, whose deist harmonies influenced Pope:

> The sensitive inhabitants of our globe, like the *dramatis personae*, have different characters, and are applied to different purposes of action in every scene. The several parts of the material world, like the machines of a theater, were contrived, not for the actors, but for the action; and the whole order and system of the drama would be disordered and spoiled, if any alteration were made in either.

Not for the actors, but for the action. Here we can see how the work of art can on the one hand be indispensable to humane living by supplying an image of possible order and harmony, and yet on the other hand be subversive of human efforts to live humanely within in-

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stitutional frameworks. For the work of art (even when, as in the romantic dispensation, it is thematically committed to process) has not only come to the end of its own process, and therefore in an important sense has successfully challenged time, but has also come to represent an ideal solution to the problem of end and agency—in which end is purpose or action or theme (the reason for being), and agency is the institutional means through which it is realized. We find it useful and even necessary to distinguish between end and agency in order to talk critically about a poem, for instance, but if the poem is successful it is a synergistic unit in which end and agency are so congruent that it resists the distinction. The poem teaches itself, holds itself up as a model achievement. It can even propagandize the attitude that anything short of its own ideal marriage of end and agency is intolerable, if not immoral.

All human institutions, simply in the interest of efficient operation and survival, tend to assert themselves as models of harmony, as do poems or symphonies that celebrate the marriage of end and agency. This is no more true of the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV than of the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church, the American presidency, an insurance company, or any moderately successful hippie commune. Nor are the executives of our institutions necessarily power-hungry deceivers whose chief concern is to conceal the disparity between image and reality; it is through them that the human fear of disharmony (which is also their fear) is expressed. Therefore we cooperate, with surprising willingness, with the operant means: the indoctrination, or propaganda, or advertising that will make us part of the institutional poem. Because people can stand very little disharmony, they are just as willing to allow the institution its necessary hyperbole as they are to allow it to the poet, sensing that without it neither can function. The difficulty, of course, is that the closer the institution approaches the poem's synergistic marriage of end and agency, the less likely it is that Shakespeare's Antonio will make an appearance. Jacob Burckhardt as well as Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor knew all about this.

III

But the fact is that although our poetry was never more concerned with the congruence of end and agency, the human scene itself is markedly unpoetic and apprehensive of Robert Fludd's "warring discord." What Alfred North Whitehead said fifty years ago in *Science and the Modern World* had been true for a long time and is still true. To him the radical inconsistency of a scientific realism, in combination with a belief in man as a self-determining organism that is at the basis of

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modern thought, "accounts for much that is half-hearted and wavering in our civilization." Unlike the men of the Middle Ages, "who set before themselves the ideal of the attainment of a harmony of the understanding," we must be content "with superficial orderings from diverse arbitrary starting points." For Whitehead, as later for C. P. Snow, this radical inconsistency, this failure in harmonious vision, can be expressed also as a two-culture split. "Until recently," Snow writes, "nearly all writers have been soaked in classical and renaissance literature. For the most part, neither philosophy nor science interested them, and their minds were trained to ignore them."

The literary intellectual's avoidance of science and philosophy was, and to a degree still is, a survival technique, as Niels Bohr's concept of complementarity was for physics: a way of protecting such harmony of vision as one happened to possess. The result might have been a dangerous limitation of perspective, but it has had advantages for the literary intellectual's participation in revolutionary activities. Over the past two centuries, the constant experience of literature, with its congruence of end and agency, has tended to make the extraliterary world a place of painful alienation and moral contamination for the literary intellectual, and has predisposed him to use the harmonious work of art as a model in the effort to remake society. "That the true and perfect world revolution is still somehow possible remains, after all, the dream of the Left," Renee Winegarten remarks in her brilliant essay "Literary Revolutionism" (*Commentary,* June 1970). The dream endures in considerable part because the work of art defines by contrast the incongruence of end and agency in human society and so always has a revolutionary potential for properly disposed dreamers.

Winegarten has a good deal to say about "the deep attraction that violent action holds for the modern intellectual, whether he is on the Left or Right"—especially as that attraction is expressed in hopes for the true and perfect world by way of bloodbath, permanent revolution, creative terror, holocaust, or violent convulsion. Given the traditional expectation that the experience of art and literature will be humanizing, there would seem to be a paradox here. But the paradox is in the art model itself, in which actors and all other means are "cruelly" and "ruthlessly" subordinated to the action—to the exigencies of the vision of clarity and order (or, as in so much post-Romantic art, to the vision of process, obscurity, and disorder). "A French admirer," Winegarten writes, "regarded Che Guevara as a man not to be distracted by thoughts of his children from the revolution." To have been distracted by thoughts of his children, or by the morality of acts that in other contexts

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he might have considered dubious or inhuman, would have been to disrupt the end-agency congruence of his life-poem. The abandonment of his children was his poetic license, his aesthetic-political Machiavellianism. In the vision of the revolution, as in the vision of the poem, the end always justifies the means.

Indeed, in the radical vision the terms of political theory are interchangeable with those of poetic theory. In Karl Shapiro's *To Abolish Children*, for instance, the aspiration to true poetry demands permanent revolution and a degree of iconoclastic rejection of all existing and past poetry that suggests the Nechayev-Bakunin *Revolutionary Catechism*. For Shapiro "literature is an endless and very ancient cemetery which is still being used," and he wonders: "Why should poets be buried in Westminster Abbey? Potter's Field would be more decent." He implies that the perfect solution for Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" would be an Orwellian process that would obliterate the memory of poets at precisely that moment when they show signs of exerting influence. Shapiro, in fact, expresses a reductionism as thoroughgoing as that which Tom Wolfe has wittily analyzed in twentieth-century painting (*The Painted Word*). In Shapiro's poetics, no less than in conceptual art and revolutionary politics, the reductionist temper aspires to a perfect and harmonious symbiosis of end and agency. Modern art is therefore "deeply vandalistic, for all the great arts of our time are visibly destructive of authority." Not surprisingly, Shapiro's saint is Sade, that great harmonizer of man and nature, who points the way to a "gradual and total relaxation of authority" and the "release of consciousness and joy."

For Shapiro, as for all apostles of the new politico-aesthetic harmony, the true enemy is the bourgeoisie. For the literary revolutionist "to contemplate destruction on a grandiose scale," says Winegarten, "it is necessary to feel unrelenting hatred for existing bourgeois society that is taking so long to die." The savage hatred of the "rotting bourgeois carcass" in Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, "is a form of visceral self-hatred. Like all Manicheans of the Left, he too required a battle between the forces of good and evil." Daniel Aaron, in *Writers on the Left*, has shown the same savage hatred at work among American literary revolutionists of the 1920s and 1930s—in Mike Gold, for instance, whose hatred of bourgeois good manners and politeness was inseparable from his denigration of Lincoln and his extolling of John Brown as a Bolshevik (although God knows that Brown had plenty of bourgeois aspirations).

The literary intellectual's hatred of the bourgeois is, of course, anything but simple in its origins. For purposes of self-definition, and in

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order to generate the necessary moral energy, the former needs to frame himself in a battle between the forces of good and evil. In order to understand Poe, Baudelaire had to imagine him as a victim of corrupt bourgeois democracy; having done so, it was almost inevitable that he should write: "It must be difficult to think and write readily in a country which has millions of rulers, a country without a great capitol and without an aristocracy." The real paradox is that the literary intellectual is so willing to define himself in terms whose lack of subtlety he would find intolerable in, and all too characteristic of, the bourgeois. But this, I suppose, only indicates the crisis atmosphere in which the literary intellectual lives, and the extent to which, as Winegarten says, he needs "the tidiness of extreme solutions as a refuge from inner chaos." In his eyes the bourgeois represents a combined aesthetic and political threat: being oriented to money, he is not only hostile to, or unappreciative of, literary and artistic values but is, a fortiori, hostile to the work of art as a redemptive political model. The bourgeois, as Beaudelaire knew, is moved by no grand dreams of the just and harmonious society. However imperfectly or selfishly, he is ordered to democracy; and it is a rare literary revolutionist who hears in the jangles of democracy any intimation of the music he longs to hear. Democracy simply has too many rulers.

IV

It is plain that Adolf Hitler had no more interest in the music of the spheres than did Samuel Pepys, but this insensitivity did not keep Hitler from being a great harmonizer for whom the work of art was the model. "His sense of political mission and his passion for architecture were always inseparable," says Albert Speer. The Third Reich was his aesthetic edifice. Architecture is an appropriate model for one who aims at a violent and total subordination of actors to action. In poems, plays, and novels the actors can get out of hand and threaten the action, but in architecture there is only inanimate material to contend with. If Hitler had been a frustrated novelist, it might have been harder (though of course not impossible) for him to dispose of the inharmonious Jews. As it turned out, he did dispose of them as ruthlessly as an architect might dispose of a nonfunctional cornice or balustrade. "The Fuehrer once more expressed his determination to clean up the Jews in Europe pitilessly," Joseph Goebbels notes approvingly in his diaries. "There must be no squeamish sentimentalism about it." The Fuehrer was anticipated not only by Burckhardt's unsentimental artist-tyrants, but by those enlightened eighteenth-century British "cosmic tories" who read

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the cosmos as an art work in which the sufferings of one order of beings served to enhance the pleasure of the next higher order and the harmony of the whole.

Fascism aspires to an artlike marriage of end and agency, to the greatest possible subordination of actor to action. For a brief period, the Third Reich came close to achieving this synergistic state of affairs, and as a result great works of reconstruction as well as terrible human atrocities were accomplished with remarkable efficiency. How important a factor the aesthetics of fascism was in these accomplishments has been spelled out powerfully by Susan Sontag in her essay "Fascinating Fascism" (the *New York Review of Books*, February 6, 1975). She reminds us of Goebbels's remark in 1933: "We who shape modern German policy feel ourselves to be artists . . . the task of art and the artist being to form, to give shape, to remove the diseased and create freedom for the healthy." Ten years later he writes in his diaries about the Fuehrer's "greatest admiration" for his work: "German war propaganda was a masterpiece from beginning to end." One suspects that, like the true artist, he had complete faith in his masterpiece. According to Speer, Walther Funk, minister of economics, was convinced that the basis of Goebbels's propaganda was his capacity to believe his own lies. Analogically, his lies were the necessary hyperbole of the literary artist, which Goebbels needed to believe in as much as Cervantes needed to believe in the extravagances of Don Quixote.

Fascist art, says Sontag, exalts "two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude." It "glorifies surrender; it exalts mindlessness; it glamorizes death." It displays the utopian aesthetics of physical perfection. Thus "the SS was designed as an elite military community that would be not only supremely violent but also supremely beautiful." It is a mistake, therefore, to say that fascism stands only for brutishness and terror; it stands also "for an ideal, and one that is also persistent today, under other banners: the ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community; the repudiation of the intellect; the family of man (under the parenthood of leaders)." The fact that the propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl (*Olympiad* and *Triumph of the Will*) can still affect us suggests to Sontag the contemporary appeal of "such diverse modes of cultural dissidence and propaganda for new forms of community as the youth/rock culture, primal therapy, Laing's antipsychiatry, Third World camp-following, and belief in gurus and the occult."

Renee Winegarten is, I believe, in substantial agreement with Susan Sontag. Speaking of the appeal of the underground life of the active

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revolutionary, for instance, Winegarten writes: "The lonely self-abnegation of a stern but martyred elite of *guerrilleros* seeking all or nothing, victory or death, recalls (in everything but declared purpose) the heroic ideal of the warrior-monk or soldier-saint bent on self-realization and so popular in pre-war fascist-minded circles." And political scientist A. James Gregor is in agreement with both Winegarten and Sontag: "Once again the hero 'half-soldier and half-monk' conjured up by José Antonio, the 'worker-soldier' of Ernst Jünger, and the 'warrior-youth' of Robert Brasillach, have become the models for revolutionary youth throughout the world. These have been, and are, fascist models. Marx never conceived his 'new men' in the guise of warriors."

Indeed, Gregor's *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics*, with its thesis that Mussolini is more relevant to contemporary political realities than Marx, gives Sontag a detailed corroboration. Gregor helps one see why, as Sontag says, "Courses dealing with the history of fascism are, along with those on the occult (including vampirism) among the best attended on college campuses," and why the current fad for Nazi regalia "may indicate something quite different: a response to a repressive freedom of choice in sex (and possibly in other matters), to an unbearable degree of individuality." The repressive freedom of choice and the unbearable individuality are an aspect of that crucial disharmonizing event in modern society: the extreme separation of end and agency that accompanies (and is in part responsible for) affluence and institutional breakdown.

A half century ago Emile Durkheim wrote in *Suicide:*

> With increased prosperity desires increase. At the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority, the richer prize offered these appetites stimulates them and makes them more exigent and impatient of control. The state of de-regulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining.

It is this anomie, this process that produces fragmented societies and alienated individuals left with the desperate dream of the harmony of the completely autonomous self, that for Winegarten, Sontag, and Gregor prepares the ground for the charismatic fuehrer-artist with his vision of the new fascist harmony in which end and agency are once again blissfully married.

V

Human beings, it appears, can stand very little disharmony, which is only to say that their tendency is to experience as an intolerable burden

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the muddy vesture of decay that shuts them away from the transcendent music. At the same time, they have a very limited capacity to live separated from what they imagine virtue to be, for their imagination of virtue is itself an imagination of harmony. In Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, surely one of the most moralistic books ever written, virtue and harmony are synonymous, and by clear implication a national condition short of total virtue and total harmony is unbearable. End and agency, like matter and form, must be experientially one. This demand is not only the necessary hyperbole of a political dreamer whose dreams for a while came true; it is also the necessary hyperbole that bedevils contemporary society—everywhere divided, everywhere sick of division, and therefore all too susceptible to the related tyrannies of harmony and virtue.

Hitler was a bringer-together of the divided. In his 1937 Munich art lectures, he laid down the principle that there should be only one art, German Nordic art, and that it was a mistake to attempt to divide art into the various schools—a division that was the consequence of the bolshevism of art. Art in this view (which is not far from the view of conceptual art) serves the marriage of end and agency in society generally, and is indistinguishable from propaganda and censorship. Its proper ceremonial was the Goebbels-directed burning of banned books in front of the State Opera on Unter den Linden on May 10, 1933. The American journalist Louis P. Lochner, who witnessed this event, reports that "every few minutes another howling mob arrived, adding more books to the impressive pyre. Then, as night fell, students from the university, mobilized by the little doctor, performed veritable Indian dances and incantations as the flames began to soar skyward." At the height of this orgy, says Lochner, the little doctor spoke, saying, among other things: "You are doing the right thing in committing the evil spirit of the past to flames at this late hour of the night. . . . The past is lying in flames, the future will rise from the flames within our hearts." Here with a vengeance, functioning as prologue to still more terrible burnings, is Sontag's sadomasochistic theatrics of fascism: an art work in which the actors are ecstatically lost in the action, wrapped beyond alienation and anomie in a sweet dream of harmony.

Hitler's theory of an undivided art may strike one now as being more politics than aesthetics, but it puts him in the company of those literary revolutionists whose deep attraction to violence so disturbs Winegarten. They too point toward an undivided art, as indeed do all theorists who place a heavy salvational burden on art by insisting that it be a major means to harmony and virtue in human affairs. This is the tyrannous insistence that Cynthia Ozick revolts against in her moving essay "All

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the World Hates the Jews" (*Esquire*, November 1974), in which she recounts her experience as she waits desperately for news of the Yom Kippur war, only to be distracted when a poet friend calls to steal away the precious time with a long-distance reading of his new poem. "Then and there," she writes, "I vomited up literature; I was turned against every posture grounded in aesthetics. Art is indifferent to slaughter."

Those who do not know that art really can be indifferent to slaughter are so wrapped in a dream of art that they are not likely to see that when art is bonded to politics it may be even more slaughterous. Art is free to move away from slaughter and free to move toward variety only to the extent that its realm is in some important sense kept separate from the realm of politics (which is not the same thing as saying that it ought to be considered altogether irrelevant to politics). The irony is that one would expect literary intellectuals, even when they are also revolutionaries, to defend, not discourage, the necessary separation of realms—just as one would expect them to maintain, not abandon, the distinctions and to refine, not obscure, the definitions without which humane life is impossible.

Of course, humane life is not possible at too great a remove from virtue and harmony. Human beings begin to move toward anomie and inhumanity when they begin to doubt that in their essential selves they have a vital connection with the force that moves the heavens and all the stars, when they begin to doubt that their sense of justice has some ground in the order of things. Nevertheless, the real question for one who finds Winegarten, Gregor, and Sontag persuasive may be not how to end disharmony and evil but how to realize the desirability of manhood or womanhood. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, evil and disharmony, and therefore some measure of alienation, are the inseparable conditions of moral freedom and self-definition. Some provision, however wary, must be made for Shakespeare's Antonio. The human person is only possible where there is an awareness of the gap between end and agency in human institutions. But being a man or woman is a high-risk enterprise; the gap may come to appear terrifyingly or intolerably wide. Those who become terrified by it are as likely to end up in tyrannies of virtue as those who become morally outraged by it.

But, as the history of the past century makes clear, the really frightening thing is how easy and inevitable final solutions to the problem of evil and disharmony can be made to appear. The easiness and inevitability are in another aspect the problem of the communications media: not that we know too much to have faith in anything (although this is the way it is with many of us) but that, threatened with Whitehead's

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"superficial orderings from diverse arbitrary starting points," both the frightened and the scandalized among us are strongly tempted to use fanaticism and censorship as ways of handling information and thus making faith too easy. Perhaps a corollary, then, is that the true measure of a free and humane society is not so much the extent to which harmony and virtue prevail in it as the degree to which its members have a disciplined capacity to live with the jangling evil that is the underside of its freedom, but without ever ceasing to oppose it.

A hard position; but the most likely alternative, the tyranny of virtue and harmony, is in its most likely consequences harder still. In *The Last Days of Hitler*, Hugh Trevor-Roper writes about those events that followed the final silent handshaking as Hitler met for the last time those who were gathered with him in the Berlin Bunker. Afterward the participants in this scene discussed its significance and agreed

> that it could have one meaning only. The suicide of the Fuehrer was about to take place. Thereupon an unexpected thing happened. A great and heavy cloud seemed to roll away from the spirits of the Bunker-dwellers. The terrible sorcerer, the tyrant who had charged their days with intolerable melodramatic tension, would soon be gone, and for a brief twilight moment they could play. In the canteen of the Chancellery, where the soldiers and orderlies took their meals, there was a dance. The news was brought: but no one allowed that to interfere with the business of pleasure.

What were they celebrating if not a return from the terrible sorcerer's tyranny of virtue to a world of good and evil in which the harmoniously united realms could be experienced again as humanely divided? How ironic, and yet how appropriate, that the return should have been ritualized by a dance.

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Rest in Prose: The Art of the Obituary

WILLIAM HALEY

In literature, as in life, death has always been a subject of transcendent interest. From the words the traveler in an antique land found on the pedestal of the statue of Ozymandias, lying in the desert, to the print on the prompter guiding the television newscaster through the career highlights of today's notable deceased, necrological writing has kept its place through the centuries. Excepting only an atomic cataclysm, there is no sign that, whatever social, political, or cultural upheavals may be in store for mankind, it will not continue to do so.

Forms and styles have, of course, varied. The brevity of Simonides is one of the reasons he has stayed immortal. It would be considered inadequate, indeed lese majesty, as a memorial treatment for any nation's great men today. Yet memorial writing of all kinds, from tombstones to biographies, is briefer than it was in the nineteenth century. True, America has lagged behind Europe in this progression. Carl Sandburg and Douglas Southall Freeman, for instance, inherited the voluminous mantles of Morley and Monypenny and Buckle. Philip Magnus's singleton *Gladstone* has superseded its three-decker Victorian-style forerunner. Lincoln was certainly worth more volumes than Disraeli, but even *The Prairie Years* and *The War Years* were reduced by Sandburg to one volume.

Some necrological literary forms have almost disappeared. Epitaphs, eulogies, elegies, threnodies, panegyrics are now in disuse. Yet each had its practitioners in its day. Samuel Johnson's misfortune has been that his throwaway remarks live on, not his considered works. "In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath" is still quoted; his masterly "Essay on Epitaphs" is forgotten. Among elegies, Milton's *Lycidas* and Shelley's *Adonais* are immortal, Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy" some way behind. Three generations have produced no addition.

The French *éloges* have had a longer life and still show some stamina. There is the tribute each new member of the French Academy must pay to his predecessor on becoming one of the forty "Immortals," most of them soon forgotten. When I was young, Bossuet was imposed on me as a master of this art. I remember having to translate page after page of his *Oraisons Funèbres*. (This was followed by the exercise of having to turn parts of Longfellow's *Evangeline* into French. I cannot now recall which task I disliked more.) Gibbon confessed that it was his reading of Bossuet that converted him to Roman Catholicism, adding "I surely fell by a noble hand." (Bossuet had no such effect on me. He merely bored me.) And indeed in the field of *éloges* Sainte-Beuve did not give Bossuet pride of place. Fontenelle had that. "The seventy *éloges* he spoke in the course of forty years are the richest and most pungent collection that can be imagined. . . . His manner was unique . . . his simplicity absolutely exquisite." Sainte-Beuve added in his *Causerie* on Monsieur Pariset, himself a professional eulogist, that Fontenelle avoided the inherent weakness of panegyrists, "magniloquence and exaggeration."

Although they were not written for speaking, I have sometimes thought that Izaak Walton's *Lives* came as near as anything we have to English versions of the French *éloges*. Walton has often been placed among the biographers, but he was a eulogist. As John

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Keble showed, however pleasing Walton's "Life of Mr. Richard Hooker" is to read, it is far from faithful to its subject. There was, in Keble's words, "the peculiar fascination, if one may call it so, by which Walton was led unconsciously to communicate more or less his own tone and character to all whom he undertook to represent." This is the failing of most great artists who embark upon the depiction of other people. There is something of Carlyle in all of his *Heroes*. The greater the speaker's and writer's genius, the more—imperceptibly to himself, and however hard he tries to avoid it—he draws himself onstage. And that is where his public wants him. People went to hear Carlyle as much to study him as the men he was talking about. We read Chesterton on Shaw for Chesterton; Shaw on anyone for Shaw.

The three forms of commemorative writing surviving today are newspaper obituaries, biographies, and, in countries that have them, dictionaries of national biography. All have distinct characteristics. The English *Dictionary of National Biography*, which G. M. Trevelyan described as "the best record of a nation's past that any civilization has produced," has in this century covered each decade in a volume published ten years after the end of that decade. Thus the men and women who died between 1951 and 1960 and were deemed worthy of inclusion appeared in the volume published in 1971. The 1961–70 volume will appear in 1981, and so on.

In the meantime, however, there has been published in England *Obituaries from The Times 1961–70* (Newspaper Archives Developments Ltd., Post Office Box 4013, Amity Station, New Haven, Connecticut 06525; $50). Some might call it the 1981 *D.N.B.* volume in its raw state. Admittedly many of the people in this volume will graduate to the *D.N.B.* But having had it as a companion for some time, and browsing through it, and having used the *D.N.B.* professionally for over fifty years, I have been struck by the separate criteria for inclusion, the differences in tone and treatment, and the great variations in style that the two publications display. And I must say that I find *Obituaries from The Times 1961–70* not only more readable, but also more psychologically true to its decade. Based on this volume, a case can, I think, be made that obituary writing is at least a minor art.

I must, in the usual parliamentary manner, declare an interest. I was editor of *The Times* from 1952 to 1966. For over half the period covered by this volume, I was ultimately responsible for all the obituaries the paper printed. (Vivid memories have been awakened by suddenly recognizing some I myself wrote.) An editor's responsibility in a matter such as this is general, not specific. But there was more consultation between the obituaries editor and me than I had with some other editorial departments. This was natural. The editor of a newspaper is presumed to have a wide judgment on the world's leading men and women. To know and appraise their characters is one of his functions. (There is no finer picture of the Edwardian age than A. G. Gardiner's *Prophets, Priests, and Kings*. At that time Gardiner was editor of the London *Daily News*.) The values an editor places on public men and women while they are alive is an indication of the character of his paper. The treatment the paper gives them when they die confirms it.

One decision at the outset was crucial. Since a reviewer of *Obituaries from the Times 1961–70* has revealed that on becoming editor I ruled that neither titles, nor rank, nor heredity, nor mere wealth should any longer be qualifications for an obituary notice in *The Times*, but only achievement, there is now no reason not to refer to it. The achievement could be in any activity, in any walk of life, in any country. The only question the obituaries editor had henceforth to ask about his subject was the one Kipling's Saint Peter put to Tomlinson: "By the worth of the body that once ye had, give answer—what ha' ye done?" It is as good a test as any I know. Bishops, boxers, businessmen, poets, scientists, rebels, all qualify under it. It could embrace Pope John and Carson McCullers, President Eisenhower and Gypsy Rose Lee.

As distinct from biographies, obituaries are the fruits of a partnership. The somewhat intermittent role of a paper's editor has been mentioned. That of the obituaries editor is continuous. In terms of the Parcae, he is both Atropos and Lachesis. By exclusion from his columns, he can cut the thread of fame. By the amount of space he allots, he can measure

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the span of it. (Increasing longevity is forcing him more and more to seek judgments he can trust that antedate his own.) He also has to choose the writer. This can be crucial. With some eminent men choice is easy. One writer, by former collaboration with the deceased, by authoritative study of his work, by instinctive sympathy with his character, can be the obvious choice. Some great polymaths will need a number of individual experts to contribute sections of their obituaries. The obituaries editor must then tailor their pieces into a literary cerement without seam.

In all choices there is the need to be sure of the obituarist's capacity for judicial detachment. Sainte-Beuve said that, in the lives of famous men, "some corners of truth need a light veil drawn across them." That is far less a requirement today. What has been called "a decent reticence" now has much reduced limits. Only insofar as it does not falsify the character of a man or woman and the matter is completely irrelevant can it be exercised. Irrelevance is out of place. So are encomiums. The purpose of an obituary is not to blame or to praise, but to depict the truth. Sometimes this is best done by a writer from a completely different field. (Is there a finer example than Hazlitt's obituary of John Cavanagh, the fives player?) I remember an excellent obituary of a boxer being written by a poet. A financial journalist has done justice to a German novelist, a civil servant to a French one. On a newspaper, choices of this kind have to be made day by day. Death never goes into recess.

One of the greatest strengths of British institutions is the help they can expect from men and women of goodwill. This can be valuable even when it is not completely disinterested. A famous man once called on me. An hour earlier his doctor had assured him he was likely to live for many years more. Being already retired, he had suddenly thought that by the time he died what he had done might be forgotten, or at least his successes and failures would be seen out of focus. So on the spur of the moment he decided to come and offer me *his* view of the relative importance of the many things he had accomplished. The emphasis he put on some, and the small value he attached to others, surprised me. He gave his reasons. A note of the conversation was put into his folder. It in no way bound the obituarist. But it did throw an interesting light on a complex character and gave a clearer idea of what had been his philosophy.

One piece of cooperation was unique. Many years ago my telephone rang near midnight. The caller was Lord X's butler with an urgent message. "Lord X presents his compliments to the editor of *The Times*. He wishes Sir William to know that he does not think he will last the night." He did not. But he had made certain of a fitting obituary in the morning. Famous last words are legion. This was a last act to ensure some remembrance. Whether Lord X had ever read *Urn Burial* I do not know. He did seek to make as good provision for his name as he did for his relics. And the old-world courtesy of the words in which he did it is a pleasing memory. Possibly something of the same nature is what causes some men—I have never known a woman to do it—to ask permission to read their obituaries. We refused to allow this, without exception. One well-known man never gave up trying. Could he have seen it, he would have found his obituary shorter than he probably expected. I do not care to think what would have been the effect on him during his final years if, like Max Beerbohm's Enoch Soames, he had found himself destined to be ignored.

Immediacy of publication distinguishes the obituary writer from the biographer. Biographies are for the future. Some are written half a century after their subjects' deaths. Obituaries are for today. Lord Northcliffe was making an impossible demand when he said he wanted his obituary to be written by the best man available "on the night." For one thing, he was some time a-dying. There was plenty of warning. For another, his ebullient and kaleidoscopic career could not have been shaken into a coherent pattern in a hurry. But he was a true journalist—the best Britain has had among its press lords—and his instinct was right. Biographies are for men well and truly buried. The obituarist should be conscious of the fact that the man he is writing about has just left the house, never to return. It is no secret that the world's great newspapers have many obituaries standing in readiness. These have to be periodically revised. If the subject lives on and on, his obituary may have to be completely rewritten by a

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new hand. His career may not have been added to, or his circumstances changed, but new facts from other sources, new assessments of past events, new light on the character of the man himself can make the most factually correct obituary no longer a true picture. In every case, whatever has been written beforehand will be gone through on the night the obituary has to be published.

This immediate valuation of a life that ended within the previous twenty-four hours is a prime asset. Obituary writing is in part an exercise in the art of presentation without extensive justification. The biographer working some time after a man's death has to make the most of whatever controversy the life contained. A magnifying glass is applied to faults or errors. The sympathies of the biographer may lead him to magnify the virtues. Enticingly mysterious circumstances may have to be unraveled, and possibly knitted together again in a form they never had. Neither the biographer's integrity nor his sincerity need be in question. The years have influenced his approach to his subject. He feels there is something he has to prove.

The obituarist, with the body not yet in its coffin, has no such purpose. He usually writes anonymously. The hour keeps him from unreasonable or exaggerated judgments. He is writing before the backwash that seeks to erode the fame of public men and before the trough that awaits the reputations of dead artists. In the presence of death his voice is not raised. His space limitations make him direct. There is neither room nor time for complication. Finality is always simple; so must immediacy be, if it is to be effective. The judgments of posterity are also simple. Jealousy, reaction from too fulsome praise in a lifetime, new evidence concerning minutiae, the younger generation's rejection of its parents' heroes and villains—all fade. The eye of eternity is more often than not akin to the eye of the obituarist. The obituary writer's final strength is that his work is read at one sitting. The judgment of the ages is also peremptory—and forgiving.

Obituary writing as a literary art depends to some extent on the subjects that are chosen or omitted. Sir Thomas Browne asked, "Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time?" In these days of world communications at the speed of light, intensive publicity, talent being used up at such a rate that efforts are made to delude us into accepting the dregs, I doubt if there are many mute, inglorious Miltons wasting any sweetness on the desert air. There have been, and will be, lapses. They are few when the world's press is taken as a whole. Obituaries in *The Times* and in the world's other serious newspapers are a better measure of merit than any official citations or honors lists, which in England are largely controlled by politicians who cannot resist playing to the gallery on occasions. The great newspapers of the world have no such temptations.

It is true that *The Times* has a weakness for favoring its own, but up to ten years ago its staff was wholly anonymous. It was right that, where justified, the record should be made explicit at the end. The three-column obituary of Iolo Williams in *Obituaries from The Times* is a good example. Outside his own fields, in which he was highly respected, he was publicly unknown. Yet he was a very remarkable man, poet, humanist, critic, eighteenth-century bibliographer, museums expert, zoologist, botanist of distinction, leading authority on English watercolors. He earned his living as a hardworking and irreplaceable member of the editorial staff of *The Times*, ready to write an article on proportional representation, about which he was also an expert, or to settle an argument between readers by writing from memory the complete text of a Victorian music-hall song. Iolo Williams enjoyed anonymity and would have been distressed by publicity. It is by disregarding lack of popular acclaim, and by commemorating such splendidly modest men as well as the famous, that the obituarist fills in the panorama of his time.

Where there is character enough—and there is always some—the obituary conveys the spirit of the man as well as the significance of his work. Obituary writing that approaches the status of an art will seek it in the illustrious and the humble alike. Great deeds cannot tell all. Lord Tedder, "the most unstuffy of great commanders, who could be found sitting cross-legged, jacketless, pipe

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smouldering, answering questions on a desert air strip," is given credit not only for "the consistency of the application of air power both for the campaign in the Mediterranean and for the reentry into Europe" but also for the effect of his "quizzical humour . . . and his twinkling eye." It is pleasant to know that Dorothy Hale White—the wife of Mark Rutherford, that fine novelist of dissent—was, when a girl, "famed in her county as a demon overarm bowler" on the cricket field, although even then she suffered from "a searing sense of sin."

In a long obituary of Professor Theodor Heuss, the German Federal Republic's first president, the fact that his "appreciation of a glass of wine and a good cigar helped in creating an almost avuncular relationship with the people, and his Swabian humour smoothed relations with Dr. Adenauer," explains how "a politician occupying a position of exalted dignity but remarkably little authority" could hold his own when ultimately faced with a constitutional crisis. Clara Bow at the height of her fame received up to twenty thousand fan letters a week because she "belonged to the cinema and was its child, as was Jean Harlow and later Marilyn Monroe. Here was no real acting ability and no exceptional beauty but just a simple love affair with the film camera, which in return could so marvellously interpret all the moods of wayward youth and could create an almost childlike fantasy of romance." Such writing not only presents a minor figure, but also something of the twenties, the only hopeful decade of this century.

Lest it be thought that this is to give too much attention to an ephemeral entertainer, there is the summing-up that concludes the fourteen columns describing Lord Attlee's historic career.

Perhaps more than any other Prime Minister he brought the atmosphere of family life into the dignified abodes of office. He abandoned the attempt to live in the state apartments at 10 Downing Street and converted the previous servants' attics into a family flat in which he led the same domestic life as previously in Stanmore. His Boxing Day parties at Chequers for the children of his ministerial colleagues and private secretaries, which followed year by year exactly the same routine, ending always with the Prime Minister himself standing by the open front door handing every departing child a bag of sweets, were perhaps the occasions when he most unbent and felt most happy.

He was to an extraordinary degree impervious to public criticism and political abuse. Often he failed even to look at the "popular" press and sometimes his main interest in *The Times* was the crossword puzzle, which he unfailingly solved. He delighted to pore over works of personal reference like *Who's Who*. His sturdiness of character, his unwavering resolution, his staunch but inarticulate love of British things were qualities of the highest worth in the silent revolution at home and in the Commonwealth over which he presided. His integrity was absolute.

Those who knew Britain's only great prime minister since the end of the Second World War will vouch for the truth of this portrait.

If I have dwelt so much on *The Times* volume it is because I know of no other newspaper that displays the art of the obituarist with such comprehensiveness, such untiring efforts at judgment, and such determination to make an amalgam of the public and private qualities of those it deals with. No French or German newspaper equals it. *Le Monde* occasionally prints excellent obituaries. After twenty-three years, I can still recall the opening sentence of the notice on Raoul Dufy in *Le Figaro:* "Yesterday a smile died in France." *Die Zeit* of Hamburg has done some fine pieces. In Britain the *Guardian* can be brilliant but is limited. Dictionaries of national biography are spreading. The first volume of the *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française* was published in 1929. The work is still in progress. In Germany there is the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* in fifty-six volumes published between 1875 and 1919, but not going beyond 1899. The *Biographisches Jahrbuch* covered the 1896–1913 period in ten volumes. These two works were victims of the First World War and its aftermath. A fresh start was made with the *Neue Deutsche Biographie* in 1953. The work is proceeding.

An opportunity to produce a completely revised English *Dictionary of National Biography* was missed in 1951. I proposed that one way of celebrating a hundred years of British progress in science, learning, and the arts since the Great Exhibition of Queen Victoria's reign would be to overhaul, reedit, and, wherever necessary, completely rewrite the whole of the then twenty-six volumes in the light of modern scholarship. The idea was

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rejected as not having sufficient public appeal. It would have cost a fraction of what was spent on the Festival of Britain and its Funfair. Now it is beyond anyone's purse to accomplish. To judge the state of affairs in America is beyond my competence. Only by constant use of such works can one gauge their quality. In a nation that is so highly personalized, compared with traditional British shyness—now, alas, being eroded—and with the seemingly limitless sums the United States can devote to less enduring activities, it would be ironic if it did not eventually lead in this field. The two-hundredth anniversary of American independence would seem an appropriate time to have made a start.

But valuable as dictionaries of national biography are, writing for them is not an art. In spite of their occasional human touches, they are mostly records of facts and received opinion. A reputation is being embalmed. The obituary writer has a different task. He has to recapture a life in the instant that it has ended. Death enhances the relevance of what he writes. His range is much wider, his style freer, his opportunities infinitely more numerous. At a time of growing state interference and increasingly regimented and uniform societies—sometimes by the will of their victims—the roll of individuality must be preserved. In the war between distinction and mediocrity, between character and the rule book, the obituary writer, whether he likes it or not, is an auxiliary. The finer the style he can bring to his work, the more effective it will be.

An obituary can impress itself more on the mind than later memorials. Its subconscious influence can be great. Obituaries are not read for reference, but for enlightenment, understanding, and judgment. Readers' minds and hearts are more engaged than they are likely to be subsequently. It is our immediate contemporaries whom we are reading about. They have lived through the same times as we have. Instinctively we compare their experiences with our own. The obituary writer, however great an artist he may be, should not seek to play on emotions. His task is to present as many facets of the truth as possible. Nonetheless, if he has worked well, impressions, however slight, will be made. Free men and women, even today, live more by examples than by precepts. Mankind has no more continuing and pervading inspiration than the daily records of its memorable dead.

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Opening Le Ba Khon's Dictionary

JOHN BALABAN

So the Soul, that Drop, that Ray
of the clear Fountain of Eternal Day,
Could it within the humane flow'r be seen.
—Andrew Marvell, "On a Drop of Dew"

The ink-specked sheets feel like cigar leaf;
its crackling spine flutters up a mildewed must.
Unlike the lacquered box which dry-warp detonated
—shattering pearled poet, moon, and willow pond—
the book survived, but begs us both go back
to the Bibliotheque in the Musee at the Jardin in Saigon,
where I would lean from ledges of high windows
to see the zoo's pond, isled with Chinese pavilion,
arched bridge where kids fed popcorn to gulping carp,
and shaded benches, where whores fanned their make-up,
at ease because a man who feeds the peacocks
can't be that much of a beast. A boatride,
a soda, a stroll through the flower beds.
On weekends the crowds could forget the war.
At night police tortured men in the bear pits,
one night a man held out the bag of his own guts,
which streamed and weighed in his open hands,
and offered them to a bear. Nearby, that night,
the moon was caught in willows by the pond,
shone scattered in droplets on the flat lotus pads,
each bead bright like the dew in Marvell's rose.

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Funerary Tower: *Han Dynasty*

LINDA PASTAN

The meaning of the figures carrying
babies in their arms is not clear.

In this season of salt
leaves drop away
revealing the structure
of the trees.

Good bones,
as my father would say
drawing the hair from my face.
I'd pull impatiently away.

Today we visit my father's grave.
My mother housekeeps, with trowel
among the stones,
already at home here.

Impatient, even at forty
I hurry her home.
We carry our childhoods
in our arms.

✪ LINDA PASTAN's second book of poems, *Aspects of Eve*, was published in 1975.

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On the Language Which Writes the Lecturer

JEANNE MURRAY WALKER

This lesson will be on language.
Wittgenstein once asserted that
every language has a structure
concerning which nothing can be said in that language.
We will talk only about what can be said in English.

Our language belongs to the Indo-European group,
subgroup, Germanic. The controllable
units of English are nouns, pronouns,
adjectives, participles, gerunds, verbs
(parsable and unparsable), and dangling modifiers
however inexactly, which convey meaning.

Words are symbolic.
All language is symbolic.
This means that language swallows whole
whatever it refers to and becomes itself the fact.
We will talk only about what can be said in English.

Suppose this: whenever you sit beside a certain girl
you feel a random peace, plain as
cows grazing in the same direction on a hillside.
You think of her and the cows graze in you.
When you evict her, they go.
Therefore she grazes in you often.

Suppose you then say, I have fallen in love.
This is a symbolic statement.
English is an alternative to the language of grazing cows.
Your symbolic English statement neither
slaughters the cows nor brings them home.
You must invent another statement for those facts.

English merely comments on the structure
of another language concerning
which nothing can be said.

This lesson has been on language.

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A Literature Against the Future

JAMES STUPPLE

An interesting development on the contemporary academic literary scene has been the rise to prominence of science fiction. In the past, science fiction (or SF, as its readers like to call it) was generally thought to be little more than a quaint, out-of-the-way literary subculture made up of a few weird writers and their small but devoted coterie of fans. While the names of Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury might have become known to some, and novels such as *Brave New World* and *1984* were read by many educated Americans, most literate people knew little or nothing about science fiction. (The just-mentioned books by Huxley and Orwell are not authentic representatives of the genre either, if you accept the fan's definition that "science fiction is fiction written by science fiction writers.") In those days, all that was needed to keep it in its place (and out of the Academy) was for some tweedy professor of English to proclaim preemptively that it was "subliterary."

Lately, however, all this has changed—so dramatically, in fact, that a recent report in *Publisher's Weekly* estimated that the annual sale of SF paperbacks alone has reached $40 million, with prospects of even more rapid growth in the future. This increase in sales does not simply imply a broadening of SF's readership, however; after many years of being shunned and ignored, science fiction has also begun to enter the classroom. There are probably at least five hundred separate SF courses already in existence throughout North America, most of which have been enjoying an extraordinary popularity. Here at California State University Fullerton, for example, the Department of English is offering six sections on science fiction, which, added to two more courses in "fantasy fiction," have attracted more students than are enrolled in all our British literature classes combined, with the single exception of Shakespeare.

In addition to this sudden pedagogical interest, science fiction is also fast becoming a fertile field for scholars and literary critics, as a large number of recent books and articles attest. Is all this attention entirely warranted? How much of it should be attributed to the workings of what Gerald Graff has called the "publication-production system" in American universities? It is still "Publish or perish" at most colleges; one must produce if one expects to enjoy the sweetest fruits of the profession. Because, in this view, literary criticism is still an expanding, rapid-growth industry, there is a constant demand for raw materials. What happened to science fiction, then, is that back in the early 1970s it was "uncovered," and when it began to become apparent that a rich new literary resource was there waiting to be exploited, the rush was on.

Another factor seems to be involved. Most of the better-known scholars and critics who have concerned themselves with SF are at colleges and universities like Cal State Fullerton—schools that form a second or third echelon within the academic community: Long Beach State, Eastern New Mexico, the University of Texas–Arlington, Southern Illinois, Indiana State, Bowling Green, the

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College of Wooster in Ohio—something of an academic southern rim. Scholars from these and similar schools, rather than continue to compete at a disadvantage with professors from the more prestigious universities, have simply opened up their own business, with its own set of seminars, panels, symposia, and literary journals (*Extrapolation* and *Science Fiction Studies*) with which to market their new product.

Most of the pieces written about science fiction offer little more than the standard show of exegetic virtuosity that one might find in any scholarly journal. These critics do not often attempt to argue that SF compares favorably with the masterworks of British and American literature. When viewed from this perspective, it is indeed inferior. At the same time, however, they do not seem to relish the idea of admitting that SF is a mass-market, middle-class, *popular* literature either—fearing, perhaps, that this admission would tend to lower its status and thereby threaten to undermine their own professional reputations. On the other hand, there are those who do attempt a simple reversal of the highbrow position by maintaining that SF is good because it is popular. But this kind of professorial populism says as little about SF as the "subliterary" epithet does, or the faithful reader's claim that it is "mind stretching" or "the literature of change."

One frequently heard argument is that science fiction is important, in fact essential, because it has the unique ability to extrapolate, to anticipate and predict the future. But there is a serious weakness in this argument—SF almost never bases its extrapolations upon a firm empirical foundation. Certainly the future is not *sui generis;* if prediction is to have any validity, then, it must make use of data that have been precisely observed and meticulously analyzed—a procedure that the science fiction writer almost never follows. Usually, in fact, only the most obvious and superficial aspects of contemporary society are extrapolated. Most often, they consist of a simplistic magnification of something taken from the pages of *Time* or from the six o'clock news, followed by its linear extension into a "time" which is little more than the stylized, one-dimensional representation of the world of the writer. An example of this kind of surface extrapolation can be seen in the recent spate of neo-Malthusian works such as Harry Harrison's "Roommates" and John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, tales that envision a future world grown so overpopulated that it has become a veritable anthill where any traces of the common bourgeois notion of the good life have all but vanished.

Science fiction is also incompetent to deal with the future because, like other essentially abstract art forms (Middle Kingdom funereal portraiture, Kabuki theater, country and western music), it is based less upon any real concern for the immediate and accurate apprehension of the empirical world than upon a set of conventions that, in and of themselves, constitute that particular genre. One need only look at the usual lineup of stock characters—the intrepid starship commander, the heroic petit-bourgeois technician, the Faustian scientist, the child-woman (the prototype is Weena in *The Time Machine*), the femme fatale, the earth mother, and a whole host of omnipotent aliens, bug-eyed monsters, and various and sundry space jocks—to see just how stylized most SF is. A similar conventionalization takes place when the writer tries to treat broader anthropological and sociological subjects. Once again a facile, misleading categorization proves to be the rule, as humans (and humanoids) are relentlessly placed into a few stylized situations, including utopias and anti-utopias, premodern tribes (Frank Herbert's *Dune*), postapocalyptic wastelands (Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*), and the aforementioned visions of urban claustrophobia.

Moreover, what provides the rationale for action in these works is usually only one or another version of a puerile Manichaeanism that is the sine qua non of the adolescent adventure story. It is not inappropriate, however, that this good-guys-vs.-bad-guys ideology acts as the basis for so many science fiction stories, since most of them are actually little more than conventional romances set in exotic worlds where their heroes are free to perform heroically. Works of this type, affectionately known as "space operas," have been around since the 1920s when Edgar Rice Burroughs was writing his Martian stories. Contrary to what some academic critics might say, most of the two thousand or so SF works

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now on the market are also space operas, ranging from trekky thrillers by A. E. van Vogt, Philip José Farmer, Roger Zelazny, André Norton, and Larry Niven to the more ambitious works of so highly regarded a writer as Ursula LeGuin.

What is referred to as the future in SF works has nothing to do with time or historical processes. It is merely a non-ordinary setting that has been loosed from its empirical and temporal moorings—a spatial, purely aesthetic phenomenon that constitutes the terra incognita required of the fantastic tale of adventure in an age when the real world may seem too banal and mundane to supply the demands of romance. Often, in fact, the reader is sent forward in time only to be returned to the past, to a world more stable and secure than his own, yet infinitely more exotic and eventful. Although there is usually a great deal of brave rushing about in these works, nothing much actually happens—only action without process, as one might expect in a static universe. I suppose one could view this (as do most SF readers) as an enjoyable and harmless literary game playing or, if one is a serious student of the future, as the worst kind of antifuturistic historicism.

Another claim that has often been made is that science fiction is the only form of literature that keeps abreast of developments in science. Upon closer examination, however, one will again discover that SF has dealt with science and technology in only the most cursory fashion, often using both as mere props—the way Wells used his time machine, complete with "saddle" and shiny chromium bars, or as Samuel Delany uses the theory of relativity in *The Einstein Intersection*, his recent potpourri of Jungian clichés and space-operatic special effects. It is also becoming apparent that the gap between scientific progress and science fiction is growing wider, as scientists consistently present us with discoveries that are decidedly more science fictional than any of those curious devices invented by romantic writers of fiction.

In the so-called "New Wave" of science fiction writing of the past decade, science fiction has become overtly and even belligerently antiscientific, especially in its obsession with mental telepathy, parapsychology, psychedelia, the occult, and other nonempirical phenomena that have all but replaced those old-time mechanical marvels. The worst of this recent "speculative fiction," as it is sometimes called, is actually the old sword and sorcery stuff, rendered *au courant* by the addition of some four-letter words and an occasional reference to sex. And even the best of it, by such current popular SF writers as Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverberg, and Philip K. Dick, seems to me to be no more than the literary equivalent of the writings of Carlos Castaneda, Jane Roberts, Edgar Cayce, L. Ron Hubbard, and others who have contributed so heavily to the new gnosticism that pervades our popular culture.

Nothing offers better proof of this current split between science and science fiction than the recent Viking expedition to Mars, the fabulous "red planet" of Robert Heinlein, C. S. Lewis, Ray Bradbury, and so many others. Viking has been a magnificent success—from a scientific standpoint. But what it found, or, more correctly, what it did not find, has undoubtedly done SF permanent harm. What all this ultrasophisticated space technology has apparently told us is that Mars is nothing more than a lifeless desert, hardly the kind of place to instill in us the "wonder of space" for which science fiction has been so famous. With every advancement of science, each more specialized than the last, the writer of SF has retreated ever more inward, away from the objective world of the scientists to yet another terra incognita where he is free to create involuted science-fictional fantasies born of his own private consciousness, or, if he still persists in holding on to some semblance of external order, to the cold and meretricious realm of myth.

Ray Bradbury spoke of this switch from outer to inner space in 1972 when the Mariner project first began to transmit pictures of the Martian landscape. In a book called *Mars and the Mind of Man*, Bradbury expressed fears that as a science fiction writer he might be "going out of business once we hit Mars." But after reconsidering his *Martian Chronicles*, he realized that what he had been doing was "writing a mythology" and (with characteristic hyperbole) "doing a Bible really." This, it seems to me, says a great deal about the nature of contemporary science fiction, not only space opera but even the writings of

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someone of the reputation of Kurt Vonnegut. Vonnegut has been writing SF off and on for the past twenty-five years. The myth that has intrigued him most in these works is a variation on the "gods from outer space" idea of Erich von Daniken, which supposes that some cosmic force far greater than man actually controls his behavior. In *The Sirens of Titan* it is the highly advanced inhabitants of the planet Tralfamadore who are revealed as the manipulators of earth's affairs, so that any action that takes place on earth, no matter how much significance might be imputed to it by humans, is in reality only the preprogrammed working out of Tralfamadorian history. Earthlings are mere puppets, living without free will, acting out a script written on a distant planet by a superior race of aliens. Vonnegut uses a similar theme in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, where he creates a fictional alter ego for himself, who is made to relive his own experiences in the bombing of Dresden in 1944. After being removed from the problematic and painful world of historical reality and transferred to the mythical world of Tralfamadore, Billy is told that life is prestructured, and that since there is no such thing as historical cause and effect, nothing can ever be done to change things. All one can do is to repeat the "so-it-goes" mantra until the mind is calmed and one enters into a state of blissful acquiescence where all questions of choice and causation and responsibility are allowed to drop away unanswered.

In *Slapstick*, his current best-seller, Vonnegut again uses this theme of cosmic determinism to indulge in another form of mythotherapy. This time, however, he uses the familiar science-fictional device of entropy, or the notion that all energy in the universe is in a state of constant diffusion, leading to disorganization, disintegration, death, and finally to the bland, tepid homogeneity of pure stasis (probably something like what Wells described at the conclusion of *The Time Machine*). Vonnegut begins to develop this idea in the prologue, where his first narrator (who is clearly a spokesman for the author) struggles to figure out "what to make of a diminished thing," to quote Robert Frost, who was in his own way another poet of entropy. Vonnegut laments the disintegration of his family, which was once a stable patriarchy but which of late has undergone a decline as one by one its members "died off or wandered away, or simply became parts in the American machine." He speaks of his own personal entropy, and how he is exhausted, and sick of his writing, and how so little is left of his "optimistic imagination and creativeness." Like so many other characters in contemporary fiction, he is primarily concerned with mere survival, with enduring a series of personal tests that "go on and on." This weary pessimism is further projected onto Dr. Wilbur Daffodil-Il Swain, the novel's hundred-year-old narrator and the last president of the United States. (The identification of Vonnegut with Dr. Swain is made clear when the narrator of the prologue says "he is myself—experimenting with being old.") Kept sedated by "tri-benzo-Deportamil," Swain lives an arid, necrophilic existence, waiting only to die. But not even death promises to put an end to this entropic weariness, for he learns from his dead sister (this is science fiction, remember) that life after death promises to be "infinitely more tiresome than this."

This idea that things are running down likewise provides the novel with its narrative structure, which consists of a series of short, fragmented passages reminiscent of those "telegraphic schizophrenic" passages in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It is prose in bits and pieces, as if this is all that is left of the classic realist novel—a talus pile at the foot of some truncated mountain. The language is entropic also: pale and depleted, characterized by scores of phatic expressions such as "think of that," "and so on," "I had to laugh," "so be it," and "bully for them." These empty end-stops punctuate the novel as stale one-liners might pad the routine of a slapstick comic or a character in a play by Beckett. The equivalent of "so-it-goes" is "hi ho," a phrase that should evoke feelings of joyfulness and warmth, but that has instead degenerated into "a senile hiccup"—an apt description of Vonnegut's style of entropy and of the novel as a whole.

The Old Man is often used in literature, as Vonnegut uses Dr. Swain, as a symbol of cultural deterioration and decay. He is, after all, the president, and his enfeebled condition is matched by that of America, which has seen a return to the barbarism of the Dark Ages. All

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institutions have disappeared, along with science and technology. Slavery and feudalism have returned, and poverty is so severe that people have been reduced to hunting rats simply to keep alive. But like most SF writers, Vonnegut seldom seems to be concerned with providing naturalistic causes for his science-fictional effects. Aside from a reference or two to the viciousness of capitalism, and the fact that the Constitution has favored the rich over the poor, he offers no historical explanation for this decline and fall (unless one is inclined to view it as an extrapolation in which New York's recent fiscal embarrassment is used as the occasion for a return to the Stone Age).

What Vonnegut would have us do instead is to view it as part of a pattern of cosmic decline and disorganization in which gravity, the very basis of universal order, has itself begun to act so irrationally and unpredictably that it has already destroyed much of earth's civilization. At this point Vonnegut begins to mix his special effects. He reveals that one reason gravity has become so inconsistent is that it is being manipulated by the Chinese, the novel's omnipotent aliens who are also masters of most other tricks (ESP, mental telepathy, teleportation, space travel, the colonization of Mars) that you might well see on "Star Trek" or read in *Analog* or the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Both of the myths that Vonnegut used in his earlier science fiction—alien intervention and cosmic determinism—are found here in the myth of entropy.

Some critics have argued that it is the use of these kinds of conventions that has given science fiction its unique significance. David Ketterer, for example, says that such devices produce a "radical disorientation" in the reader, forcing him to reexamine things from a new, science-fictional perspective. Although one might agree that a disorientation does occur in SF, it is still most questionable just how this affects the reader. Does what another critic, Darko Suvin, refers to as a "cognitive estrangement" take place? In the vast majority of cases it does not. In *Slapstick*, for instance, an estrangement or disorientation does occur when we read that America has collapsed (by now, a familiar enough convention in itself). But as soon as it is revealed that this is not owing to anything within American history itself, but to two common science fiction special effects, no further cognition, radical or otherwise, is called for. Rather than encouraging analysis, then, the use of these conventions actually impedes it, producing an end to critical thought.

Yet certain avant-garde critics persist in seeing in science fiction the intimations of a new epistemology which, according to Ketterer, will "destroy old assumptions and suggest a new, and often visionary reality." Ihab Hassan sees even more—"the imaginative form that creates new myths of our machines, new models of our social existence, new images of our destiny in the universe." He is right, of course; SF is mythical. But the myths that it creates are never new. Reworked, perhaps, and repackaged, but their glitter and shine should never be confused with true innovation and change. Where, for instance, do we find "new models of our social existence" in *Slapstick*? In China, perhaps, and its society of superhumans? But Vonnegut's irony, as usual, is far too heavy (including his satire on our current liberal-chic sinophilia), and he takes away what he would give us of Chinese utopianism before we have even had a chance to get a good look at it. And besides, the omnipotence of the Chinese, as always, has had a price: they have diminished themselves and now stand no taller than sixty centimeters.

But what of Dr. Swain's plan to lessen the great American loneliness by creating a system of artificial extended families? Again Vonnegut merely toys with us. But even if he were serious, as he almost never is, what would we have anyway, but another of those nostalgic return trips to the past (this time Indianapolis in the 1930s) with which SF is filled? He gives us glimpses of community, it is true, but they too are finally derogated and trivialized along with everything else. And what of those "new images of our destiny in the universe"? Surely we are not to find them in entropy—a myth that has been used, by intellectuals feeling themselves in decline, ever since Brooks and Henry Adams used it around the turn of the century, giving their own sense of loss and cultural decline a universal interpretation, Brooks in *The Law of Civilization and Decay* and Henry in his *Edu-*

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cation. Even though scientists are no longer unanimous in their acceptance of entropy, or the Second Law of Thermodynamics, as incontrovertible scientific truth, science fiction writers continue to use it as if it were (as in J. G. Ballard's "The Voices of Time"). With the use of this and similar examples of such five-and-dime teleology, *Slapstick* and other myth-oriented science fiction diminish the future and the possibilities of humanistic change by positing the idea that beyond the superficial empirical world there lies some meta-reality that is both absolute and unchanging. The function of such mythic paradigms is to maintain a status quo by encouraging the reader to substitute that mythic world for action that could influence future developments.

Vonnegut does more in *Slapstick* than simply manipulate the long list of science-fictional conventions and special effects. By projecting his own sense of psychic entropy onto the novel's two narrators, then onto American civilization, and finally onward until it becomes cosmic law, he is able to turn history into myth, autobiography into science fiction. The result is that he reifies and makes absolute the fact of alienation and human suffering, transmuting them into a threnody of despair. Vonnegut, like other contemporary writers of science fiction, gives us the illusion that the universe is open and that mankind will be able to affect and alter the world in years to come. But when we look to discover just how such a transformation might take place, we learn that the universe, no matter how sublime it may be, is closed. Looking for new possibilities, we find only tired conventions and archaic myths, which conspire to stop time and keep all things fixed and frozen as if on some intergalactic great chain of being. Offering us what Ketterer calls "new worlds for old," contemporary Anglo-American science fiction gives us exactly the opposite. Rather than boldly envisioning a future of hope, it blinds us with escapes and evasions. Filled as it is with a seductive, mystifying blend of fantasy and metaphysics, it is hopelessly xenophobic—truly a literature against the future.

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The Provincial Towns

BARNETT SINGER

One can arriye in France and still find French life intact on the surface—the same spires and facades, the same nougat and crêpe sellers, the blind accordionist rousing your conscience in the subway, the anemic ice cubes, the classics (unread) in bourgeois bookcases, the cafés full of prolix customers. But France, like other Western countries and maybe more than most, seems tired. Once a country of ideals—cathedrals, 1793, the Dreyfus affair—it now seems bereft of them.

The tiredness of Paris is an infection to flee from, so after several days there, I board the train for the town of Auxerre. The major town of lower Burgundy, with a population of forty thousand, Auxerre goes back to Roman times. It has accumulated a good deal of medieval and classical architecture on its narrow streets, including several churches worth visiting, and a group of new town houses that blend nicely with the older structures. The town, which lies in a rolling region of orchards and vines, receives two stars from Michelin, and I find that a first view of it at dusk does not belie the rating. After Paris, the air seems soft and pure. The Yonne River is green. Fishermen fish and gypsy drunks snooze. A breeze skates down the river, and in warm weather there are spooning couples in American-style sport shirts and summer dresses. On the surrounding hills, churches dominate the city, and when the sky grows black they become very white. Charming little Auxerre.

Climbing into town, however, one hears what is becoming an increasingly deplorable phenomenon in all of France: noise. Supply trucks that rattle through larger towns generally take the outer highways here, but just one two-horsepower Citroën constitutes a major disturbance on a cobblestoned street. The gimpier the car, the greater the noise; at the outset of my trip obsessive first gears seem the worst enemy of French civilization. But then here comes another motorcycle piloted by some would-be Steve McQueen. The boy barely misses a drunk whose nose, in a preswollen stage, might have been seen at Verdun. Such youths, as serious at a jukebox or pinball machine as they are on motorbikes, may be trying to escape a monumental and oppressive past that is evident everywhere in a place like Auxerre. Or maybe they haven't been nourished on television long enough to mock their own way of life. Television is now switched on by all age groups, in small towns and large, and its standardized emanations add to the atmosphere of these narrow streets at dusk.

When Edward Maslin Hulme visited Auxerre just before the Nazi invasion, he associated it with all the traditional French virtues. "Here," he said in *Wandering in France* (1941), "one gains the impression that France is the most orderly and beautiful country in the world, and that it is a country in which one can have a deep satisfaction of social freedom, be surrounded with an air of culture, enjoy good living, delicious wines, charming women, a general emancipation from the puritanism that has done so much to banish gaiety and art from our land." Culture? We know from a poll of the sixties that half of all adult Frenchmen do not read one book a year. Romance? Its future was already seen as doubtful by André Maurois and Paul

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Valéry in the 1930s, and their fears have been subsequently borne out. In 1970 the average *maison de la presse* in towns like Auxerre contained no sex magazines that I could see; today there are at least twenty-five, and they speak to people of all categories—to homosexuals, to the violent, and to the impotent. With the successful exportation of these northern neuroses, then, French romance and *gaieté* are driven out. Of course, one can't keep sighing for the era of Charles Trenet. But in the streets of a place like Auxerre the inhabitants do look rather grim, with inflation and taxes doubtless playing their part. And how they all *run*. Montesquieu's Persians would be as startled by the hustle and bustle in a present-day province as they were in Louis XIV's Paris. "*Aller vite. Mais aller où?*" wondered Georges Bernanos. Well, for one thing, they go home—to eat. So the off hours when people eat become deathly silent on certain side streets, and one must always be prepared to revise his assessment in this country.

France after 1950 quickly became motorized. A book like Laurence Wylie's now classic *Village in the Vaucluse* would have come out very differently, even in the 1960s. No country except Japan became urban more quickly after World War II. None in the Western world lost its peasant base more abruptly (in 1939 peasants were still the largest social category in France). Britain has lived with industrialism and pollution for at least a hundred and fifty years, whereas the impact of these changes fell on France much later. But France has definitely caught up. It has made its bet, but this is no Pascalian bet—there is much that can be lost. If Americans seldom talk about the biggest and best any more, the French do. This year they will launch the first two models of *Naviplane 500*, the largest hydrofoil in the world, and they have just completed the *Batillus*, the largest tanker in the world, at Chantiers de l'Atlantique, Saint Nazaire. Expressways are being extended to every corner of the country, and a new tunnel—the longest, most modern, and safest in France—allows you to motor through the Vosges Mountains in seven minutes. There is a new electric scaffolding rig, and there is the Concorde. And in a technical way even ordinary vacationers "mobilize" in August; they go to the "Western Front," as the vocabulary of the newspapers expresses it. Other recent impressions: the net bag for shopping is now giving way everywhere to throwaway bags. Yogurt containers that cheat at the bottom (like wine bottles) are discarded by the tens of thousands every day. A Parisian statistic: in 1926 the weight of dusts that fell on the capital each year was evaluated at 100 tons; today it comes to some 40 tons a day.

Given this pace of change, French social scientists are kept busy inventing terminology to keep up with it—terms, for instance, like *rurbanisation* for the growth of suburbia and the decline of isolated countryside. Jean Onimus, having studied the growth of our own megalopoli, predicts that French towns will soon lose their integrity, and form parts of vast urbanized zones. In 1921, France was 26.4 percent urban; in 1967, 67.2 percent; but these social scientists look to our own suburbias for a deeper kind of qualitative transformation. Now, says A. de Swarte in *Le Monde*, "everyone wants to 'consume' nature and notably rural space. . . . So there is that flight toward the individual home which, at the rate of some 300,000 constructions per annum, engenders the inexorable destruction of this rural space." De Swarte and others like him write very differently from Le Corbusier, who in 1946 described enthusiastically the growth of American parkways and other facilities for the automobile. Now the automobile is the chief agent of *rurbanisation*. Need one caution, however, that another and more lasting oil embargo could make even these Cassandras quickly obsolete?

If you come to towns like Auxerre, you will be besieged by predictions that sound essentially like this: "*c'est ce qu'il y a du plus bourgeois*"; "*c'est une ville très fermée*"; "*il n'y a rien pour la jeunesse*"; and so on. The *jeunesse*, especially, thinks, almost to a boy and girl, that the pot of gold is anywhere but where they are standing. For many, the paradise over the hill is still America; they fail to realize that even if this were true, humans generally can't remain in paradise too long. So Voltaire's Candide left Eldorado, and Adolphe and Julien Sorel chafed after successful feminine conquests. The French kids I have observed and talked with generally look

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forward, not backward, and if they still dance a wonderfully Cartesian jitterbug to Bill Haley and the Comets, they do so out of no devotion to camp. Rather, they perceive America in queerly Burkean fashion and don't fully grasp the changes that have occurred between the era of bop and that of rap. It is all present-day America. A small fringe, however, has moved toward communes (*communautés rurales*), painted buses, organic food, and the like. Can the French no longer initiate anything themselves, one wonders? When they render Morris Albert's excellent *Feelings*, must *Dis-lui* be done in the identical arrangement and tone? Do pop stars like Johnny Hallyday *have* to metamorphose themselves slavishly through each hair style and attitude that followed what is now called *la belle époque* of rock (pre-1964)? Kids frequent this or that café almost every day of the year, so the life lived there must be important, if not culturally prestigious. We know enough about Romain Rolland's experience of growing up in nearby Clamecy; what of these future adults? What will today's crucible ultimately yield?

It will not yield a historically minded group of citizens, for the stories about old Gaul dispensed at school are no longer taken seriously; and as for the layered history on local cathedrals, few want anything to do with that either. France spends millions keeping up its past, but in interview after interview I found the past meant nothing to its future leaders (who may change in time). To be fair, Parisians rarely go to the Louvre either, and thus it was quaint to see Zola's wedding party (in *L Assommoir*) traipse among the antiquities. Quaint also to meet, as I recently did, a Parisian lady vacationing with a Michelin guide in a different *quartier* from her own. But it is a fact that towns with much history, like Auxerre, have become museum towns, and I think the French are slightly embarrassed by this. Living for the first time without any substantial mode of transcendence, confronted each day by the unity and faith that built great churches, they cannot look too hard at such examples of idealism. Who, in fact, can measure up?

By the nineteenth century, churches had already been declining in importance here, for Auxerre was a strongly anticlerical city until that ideology melted into socialism or indifference. One of France's great anticlerical school reformers has a statue above the river—the Auxerrois physiologist Paul Bert (died 1886), whose view was roughly that good priests are dead priests. But Bert was a rooted native of the town, whereas many who live here now are not. In addition to laborers from Arab and African lands (seen in all French towns of some size), there has been much internal immigration and emigration. In 1950, says Charles Bettelheim in a local monograph, three-quarters of Auxerrois were not born there, and only 9 percent of the population could trace itself back two generations in the city. With the university explosion, bright students go off to Paris or to Dijon, and so do many mediocre ones.

The twentieth-century ritual that still draws well—better than churches or anticlerical functions—is café culture. People sit in cafés and resolve the world's dilemmas. They get something going on a rainy day. Elders order a *coup de rouge* before breakfast (the young mostly dislike wine at any time), and they pay to be heard by the barman, who contrives never to be caught without some pouring or washing or wiping to do. La Rochefoucauld tells us that great men have grand designs; there are no grand designs in these cafés, only opinions—and the French have always needed their opinions. In the Auxerre archives one can read hundreds of nineteenth-century essays on subjects like probity or patriotism, written by people hoping to become intellectually famous, as Jean-Jacques did on the road to Vincennes. Cafés provide an outlet for the ideas of ordinary men. Upon entering, older people still greet one and all with a sacred "*messieurs, dames.*" At a café almost everybody, young and old, smokes at least one cigarette; and the three-kiss greeting is another common ritual, an atavism that possibly goes back through classical gardens and church portals to the deepest sources of French equilibrium. Still, an active equilibrium is very different from a passive one when forms become rote survivals. And the tools for renewal are certainly not in machines like jukeboxes, where youths get a kind of cultural totalitarianism each time they insert a coin, nor in the movies, nor in the ephemera of journalism. Already in the 1890s, Pastor Thomas Lamb Eliot (the poet's

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uncle) feared that minds were becoming "a hash—a sewer—a kaleidoscope"; and in the 1930s Paul Valéry would say that moderns tend to "resonate."

Evening. I sit down by a man smoking his pipe on a bench. This man, uneducated but sure, does not resonate. Can we discuss politics, which most French people like to debate? No, he confines himself to *la politique des femmes*. No smile. A former boxer, he figures that derelicts should not try to roll him. So there is crime in Auxerre? Plenty. A gypsy knifed a woman for her purse just last night. (I gripped the fat buttoned case of traveler's checks in my pocket.) It was getting colder. He kept pointing to evidence of "the other half" of Auxerre, some in new Western clothes but hungry looking. There, see that woman? I hadn't noticed her—an overbite and a rather dead face was all I could see. "She sells herself down at the café"—many *chattes pourries* here, he warned. I asked how much she cost. How much? His small eyes gave a slight twist. "*Une casse-croûte*"—a snack. "That's all she's worth," he added, and we both laughed. Beneath my laugh there was also pity, for I had read files on the history of prostitution in Auxerre and learned that the *maisons de tolérance*, for which Arthur Koestler in his autobiography had so much praise, were also hotbeds of venereal disease, and that poor country girls were often the slaves of hotel owners or madames, not to mention clients. More than ever in Auxerre, as elsewhere, one can't *not* think of the sex question.

Traversing Burgundy, I have gone from Auxerre to Mâcon, a somewhat larger town. I first view Mâcon on a bright morning by the Saône, and this riverine view is again most exhilarating. By the bank there is a long park with slides and jungle gyms, and this Sunday morning one of the swings is being used by a seventy-five-year-old lady with blue hair. There are Portuguese workers with dignified faces and aerated shoes. At night one sees them fishing the broad and polluted river. Using brightly-colored rods without reels they catch many fish the size of sardines, and they throw back none; all can be used for soup. As for the town, the worst pollution is, once again, traffic noise—noise so bad at times that one is inclined to agree with E. J. Mishan, who said automobiles are the worst invention in history. Mâcon, on the way to the Midi, may have more outdoor cafés than Auxerre, but many are simply not restful to sit in. Powerful vehicles in France are significantly praised as *nerveuses*, and so from nervous cars we get nervous music, nervous dancing, nervous talk, nervous sleep. While in Mâcon I read of a student from Nanterre who had just jumped off the Arc de Triomphe. Was this poor student, I wondered, determined to find some peace? Hard to say, but then this theme, like so many others, can be overdone. At Mâcon one also finds quiet churches, quiet libraries, and intimate museums—the Musée Lamartine, for example.

Alphonse de Lamartine, noble, poet, historian, and prominent politician in 1848, was born in Mâcon. The Lamartine museum (part of which contains old furniture) gives his genealogy, and shows the books he read as a boy, as well as some of his early diaries and literary efforts. (*Werther* almost made him commit suicide.) Just the right size, this museum calms the mind. The lady who takes care of it is a Burgundian with sparkling eyes and russet cheeks, a lady who might have sat in an eighteenth-century salon. We talk in this classical *hôtel*. When a foreigner speaks French passably, his words gain unearned importance, for the French have always prized their language; but mainly I listen. I learn that the lady is separated from her husband and has five children, learn also that separations and divorces in France have been rapidly increasing since a liberal law of 1970. So—what is *her* view of the "scene"? "The young take no pleasure in life," she answers forthrightly. "They love themselves and they love money. . . . They are very lazy and very self-oriented." An abrupt enough unfolding of prejudices. As for myself, I, too, sometimes share such prejudices, but they also make me suspicious, leery. This lady, like one I've seen yelling endlessly at her corgis, may in fact be criticizing herself. People with a sense of vocation perhaps haven't time for sweeping criticisms.

Mâcon is a nice city with more scope than is usual in the provinces. It has a fine central park with plane trees knobby at the joints,

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and planted flowers, and a war memorial. The wine from nearby vineyards is of course superb. With money one can live a good life here, I imagine, but the war memorial and tiny plaques around the city remind one of harder times. One plaque, affixed to a bridge over the Saône at a dog's-eye level, tells of a man who was harassed by the Germans and dived into the river there. Another mentions the deportation of an Alfred and Jean Lévy. Burgundy, of course, was an important region for *maquis* activity during the war—its forests provided ample shelter, with nearby Lyon the capital of the Resistance.

Did the French in harder times complain as much as they do now? Well, for one thing such complaining might be partly rhetorical; the Frenchman is that way—*râleur, rouspéteur,* loves to sound off. Don't take it seriously, says a young salesman of noble origin who gives me a lift. Yes, he'd heard a lot of complaints about the times, even by men making a lot of money. Like Père Grandet, crying all the way to the bank, he might have added. Then he admitted that, at twenty-six, city life was starting to pall for him, too. He wanted eventually to leave his Paris base and set up in a village near Quimper, Brittany. *Le Figaro* lay open beside him with yet another front-page article on problems of mass society and *machinisme*, and we passed a bookstore featuring memoirs of peasant life and works on folklore. Not even the most optimistic salesman can explain away the problem of technological modernity—our "second twentieth century."

Mâcon has always been a crossroads, marking the way to various places: interior Burgundy, Switzerland, the Midi (whose softer air and open sky one starts to feel here), even the Paris basin, the *Île de France* itself. There are mountains in view, small ones, and the Saône may be polluted, but its width is impressive. Near Mâcon are held the annual French junior rowing championships. Not far away is the Pouilly-Fuissé country and the Bresse chicken country and the Charollais beef country. If life is mainly passed in the city these days, not in valleys where poets sighed, in France it is still not difficult to get out to the valleys.

From Mâcon across France to Limoges, with an evening stop at Roanne. Three young women in a café inform me that there is nothing here—nothing for the young at Roanne. On the train a mathematician's wife who lives outside Limoges told me there was nothing in that city either. An American historian would call Limoges a hole; nearby Brive would be reviled by a French lady who lived there as "*mesquine, infecte,* full of gossip and jealousy." So there is nothing anywhere, or everywhere is nowhere.

Perhaps the modern miracles—television, tape recorders, polio cures—have, unlike religious miracles, increased earthly expectations and also the sense of deprivation that comes from overabundance (suggests John Sisk). So laymen look back to a time when delimited provincial life was carefree and gay. They underplay, as scholars overplay, the limits of epidemics, nineteen-hour days, and sexual repression. In the archives I read about a woman teacher caught kissing on the beach near Saint Nazaire in 1887; police reports had twenty graphic versions of this and her reputation was ruined. I read the distillation of Edgar Morin's interviews with peasants—*The Red and White: Report from a French Village*. These people do not want to go back to that harder life. But my three interlocutors at Roanne think, like a more tongue-in-cheek Pierre Daninos in *Les Touristocrates,* that France is "sinking." They look at me, beseech me as an American to provide some transatlantic answer.

Limoges—where Limougeauds live, as Tourangeaus and Chartrains live in their respective towns—has avenues wide as those of Zurich, also quiet squares and narrow streets like Auxerre. Avenues in this militantly anticlerical, then socialist, city are named for Jaurès, Vaillant, Combes, and of course for Turgot, the great intendant whose tax reforms, if adopted, might have prevented the French Revolution. Turgot was one of the promoters of the porcelain industry that made Limoges famous. He was also an enlightened thinker who believed the American people to be "the hope of the human race; they may well become its model." In obvious ways the heritage of Turgot's Limoges is ironic. This is a city of 135,000-odd inhabitants, with (would you doubt it?) four-film cinemas featuring porno, large super-

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markets, bustling department stores. The Monoprix chain combines both of the latter functions. People buying groceries here stand and wonder what to choose, while a loudspeaker announces bargains and a rock beat pushes nerves along, even if the feet remain immobile. At the check-out stand there are bins of gum, and candy bars for the children. In such French chains, the age of Vance Packard has finally arrived, whereas in old-fashioned grocery stores one has only to enter and a woman still asks within seconds, "*Vous voulez, monsieur?*" This happened at every one I entered, proving that small proprietors haven't grasped the soul of modern commerce, or the principle of serendipitous acquisitiveness, the knack of awaking our greediest instincts.

It is easy to forget the historical stolidity of towns like Limoges. Limoges has had a strong industrial or craft base at least since Gallo-Roman times. In that period its goldsmiths were most renowned; in the Middle Ages came the first famous craft, enamel work, as well as the spinning of fine cloth and spade making. The eighteenth century saw the launching of a porcelain industry, and the great era for that industry occurred roughly from 1840 to 1890. Shoe manufacturing became important in the latter part of the nineteenth century, employing some eight thousand workers in 1920, but declined thereafter, against competition like Bata. Today one finds manufacturers of aeronautical and automobile parts, and also one of Europe's largest die-making operations. No wonder, then, that historians are drawn to the history of workers and workers' movements in Limoges and in neighboring craft towns.

A group of French hippies take me in their bus from Limoges to a village of Charente-Maritime. The driver has done wine harvest work here, along with his former girlfriend, who subsequently drowned in the Loire trying to save a friend. The head of a farm in the village recalls this girl as one of his best workers. Now he mostly has to lure Spaniards up to do the job; the minimum wage is ruinous, but they work faster than others. He offers me homemade cognac—I have never tasted any so smooth. The peasant, born in 1911, has chiseled white hair, gapped teeth, lines in his neck, and a marvelously deep and relaxed voice. His eyes are intelligent and kind. He has an accent I have heard in Acadian Nova Scotia, and he can still speak some patois, despite the leveling influence of the school down the road. (Ah yes, no wonder there are theses on *archaïsme et modernité:* these fellows are precious and writers want to trap them on their pages.) His only son and daughter-in-law work and live there, too, and if his grandson measures up maybe he can keep the farm going. There are links to the city, of course. The family has a TV and a modern kitchen, also a tractor—but for a small farmer twelve hours a day on a tractor is almost as fatiguing as using farm animals in the old days, and one repair job can be disastrous. I wish them luck.

Next stop is La Roche-sur-Yon, capital of the Vendée *département.* The name Vendée has broader connotations than just a *département.* Along with Brittany, it is sometimes used to include western France in toto: its conservative present, its past of Royalism and of counterrevolutionary activity (1793–1830), a Catholic stronghold, an area of hedge-enclosed fields, salt marshes, and gorse. La Roche, built by Napoleon in 1804 as his capital of the pacified Vendée, was called Napoléon for a time. It is now an administrative town of forty thousand, with a main street that looks more American than any I have seen in France. Free from that constrictive past of most French towns, its spaciousness and absence of cobblestones make it quieter than Auxerre. Many farm people work here and go home on weekends to eat *en famille.* And many townspeople make touristic money here and on the Vendean coast (thirty kilometers distant). There are two cinemas—not heavily frequented, they say. There is a pleasant Cartesian park for basking in the summer sun, for reading Hervé Bazin,whose novels are very west-of-France. There are still café owls playing *belote* who look nothing if not peasant; yet even in this conservative area tradition is rocked.

At the Hôtel Napoléon I talk to a self-educated official of some importance in the hotel's establishment. Without academic degrees, he reads mostly older authors—Balzac, Lamartine, Zola—and a few moderns like Bazin. He speaks a precise, strong French, and

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sounds extremely alert and positive. He is passionately for the manual laborers; recent price rises in France (another constant topic of conversation) are for him due to too many subsidized "head workers." In La Roche, I have noticed, many people blame the government for inflation and for just about everything else; in ancient times one blamed gods or spirits. But the existence of a bursting tertiary sector *is* indisputable, and with this Catholic, maybe even Royalist, I am inclined to be in some agreement.

I go on to Rennes, the capital of Brittany if not typically Breton. I meet the family man who put me up when I was there in 1970. Very average, *en pantoufles* (slippered), older, with his children recently married off, he has put up new wallpaper and given the place a fresh paint job. He has what Henry James called "that most classic quality of the French nature—its sociability." We have a drink in town. Rennes's center never looked so fine in her eighteenth-century setting. Here intendants, *parlement*, and estates once guarded the province's autonomy, but just outside the old center there has been a building boom worthy of Baron Haussmann. Yes, says my family man, in the last several years Americanization has hit the city full force, and with Giscard's blessing. Small commerce is reeling before shopping centers—the *grandes surfaces*, where you walk kilometers, and don't know to whom to address yourself, and don't know what to buy, and are often lost. No longer is it Paris versus the provincial desert; now you don't have to go to Paris—Paris is everywhere. "Everywhere is now the same," he says, echoing many others I've heard—"*On est tous dans le même coup.*" Yet along the highway leading here the road signs nestle low like tiny stumps. Old Bretons still limp from a congenital deformation of the hip that began roughly two centuries ago (too much endogamy). And my family man is still retrograde and French enough to welcome me as a far-off visitor, not just as a person who knows how to sit on an airplane.

If, as Voltaire said, there should be only one pen per one hundred inhabitants, Rennes's mayor, Henri Fréville, deserves to have it. Fréville wrote a distinguished three-volume history of the Breton intendants, and he is one of the rare academic historians who could subsequently become mayor, senator, and president of the departmental council. Perhaps taking to heart the intendants' model of leadership, he has been mayor of Rennes for twenty-three years, and under him the city has expanded while retaining its old flavor. He has handled problems like sewage and housing adeptly. True, more and more people are moving to the suburbs or to surrounding villages, and this exodus may have effects such as we have seen in our country. It has also made a one-hour lunch almost standard. For that sort of lunch, the many new snack bars and self-service places serve well, as do the old-line *crêperies*; nice old restaurants do not. One can also eat a quick lunch at the Rennes branch of the late André Malraux's *maisons de la culture*—a building full of large windows and erected at considerable cost. The Rennes *maison* brings in jugglers from Bali and American jazzmen, as well as traveling French acting companies interpreting Molière.

This city of 210,000 has only one large industry—a Citroën plant employing some 12,000 workers. The downtown of timbers and narrow old streets and sloping gray roofs will make no one think of Toledo or Flint; the many blocks of buildings in the suburbs will. But in some of those apartments people have Louis XV furniture and drink fine wines. "Quality of life," then, is not so easy to ascertain from what meets the eye. But one of the families I knew formerly has had a palpable and unusual change in its manner of living. The father, a prosperous salesman with a considerable territory, gave it up at the age of forty-nine to build a house on the Channel and to fish. He has two helpers and is doing well at the endeavor, too. His son, pro-American in the most superficial way, used to line the walls of his room with *Playboy* photos and rock star cutouts. He would generally select bad loud music, not good loud music. Recently he made a girl pregnant, I hear, and married her, and *he* is now a salesman in Rennes. But he lacks his father's self-confidence.

Before regaining Paris, my last stop in this semicircular tour is Chartres. Here, as increasingly everywhere, is sartorial socialism—

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people who could be Americans, Germans, French—for even the stylish French have caught up (or caught down). Against such a cathedral as Chartres, jeans have to look ironic, and so do mere buildings or gardens; yet one hesitates to call this place, as did Henry James, a "rather shabby little ville de province." There may be nothing monumental outside the cathedral, but even an absent-minded person can find sights that go beyond Michelin. On the way to the cathedral on Saturday morning, the fish market is alive and rumbling. The French have become less food-conscious, but in Chartres, an inland town, one finds an astonishing array of goggle-eyed fish in the market. Some lie in a stupor until evening, including two large salmon. (Why the French need Atlantic salmon I'll never know.)

My first re-view of the cathedral after several years came at night—breathtaking! The next morning was gray and the cathedral was stained; tourists milled around everywhere. Let us not, however, desire the glory to which Flaubert aspired—"*celle de démoralisateur.*" Chartres is magnificent. Here fanaticism produced the most human of churches, with Christ and the Virgin as real and warm as they would ever be. Excessive feeling, excessive intolerance (Chartres being a child of the Crusades), and excessive balance produced a masterpiece. This was a collective enterprise of centuries. The towers of course are hundreds of years apart in style, nor is it the later, flamboyant one we are to prize most highly. There are indiscriminate assimilations from the Romans, the Old Testament, and the Byzantines; we know that anonymous pilgrims worked here in the thirteenth century, that Louis, count of Vendôme, had work done in the fifteenth century, that the Americans and Germans gave a window in the 1950s. Henry Adams says the amount of money spent on the Virgin has never been matched in any other such cause. To the visitor the saints and prophets outside may look a bit like panhandlers; so one goes inside and is surprised to find, no matter which visit this is, those fierce cobalt and bloodred windows, and what can a laymen say?

A town containing such a masterful achievement of the past can't but have difficulty presenting a suitable appeal to its modern visitors. Today Chartres Cathedral furnishes free organ concerts every Sunday, and these are apparently well attended. Otherwise, what does one do in this town? One eats, of course, and one walks; for urban renewal in the old sections has made Chartres more, not less, walkable. The Eure is filthy, but there are two large swimming pools. Industries? *Radio-technique*, a large appliance concern, and some small printing establishments. If, in this town of forty thousand people, one strips away the cathedral, one has stripped away a good deal, but not all.

I meet a girl who stood well at the Lycée Marceau. Why, in this historically minded country, Marceau? Even historians of France can constantly learn from the quiz of French streets. General François-Sévérin Marceau of Chartres was a hero in the armed resistance of France against Europe in 1792. During the Reign of Terror he was a member of the Convention and unsuccessfully opposed a decree that would have destroyed every statue inside and outside Chartres Cathedral. (Some were already broken off.) The next day another Chartrain, ultra-Republican, proposed that the whole cathedral be destroyed. For a nation at war, however, the time lost in clearing the rubble would have made this scheme impractical. So the revolutionaries contented themselves with a bonfire of books, wood crucifixes, and statues. A red cap was placed on the Virgin's head, a pike in her hand, and a smoky musical drama was enacted at the cathedral—it was called *Reason Victorious over Fanaticism*. After the Terror passed, Marceau fought under the Directory, and died at twenty-seven. Most visitors are unaware that Chartres Cathedral could have gone the way of the Tuileries, victim of another conflagration, or the Archbishop's Palace at Notre Dame. Most visitors don't realize the physical frailty of Western civilization.

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The 1976 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award

THE GREAT WAR AND MODERN MEMORY. *By Paul Fussell. Oxford University Press. $13.95.*

Citation: "In his essay, 'History,' Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: 'Every history should be written in a wisdom which divined the range of our affinities and looked at facts as symbols.' Paul Fussell has achieved Emerson's prescription. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* he has evoked the common meanings of that first cataclysm in our cataclysmic century by tracing the literary associations of its participants. He has retold the tale through its poetic visions, and has documented their lasting imprint on our consciousness. Paul Fussell has succeeded in that enormously difficult task that André Malraux once assigned to education: to translate experience into conscious thought. He has indeed 'divined the range of our affinities and looked at facts as symbols.'"

The Christian Gauss Award

T. S. ELIOT: THE PATTERN IN THE CARPET. *By Elizabeth W. Schneider. University of California Press. $10.*

Citation: "With this book, Professor Schneider has once more put the discipline of literary studies in her debt by a masterly study of the life and work of an important poet and a discriminating analysis of the issues, historical and critical, that they present. Her fresh and consistently illuminating reading of Eliot's verse and her meticulous study of his career provide a new and satisfying view of the ways in which his work, especially after 1930, was shaped and directed by what she shows to have been a careful and deliberate effort to create a coherent poetic personality for himself. The demonstration moves vigorously, with an unfailing sense of proportion and critical tact. It is full of acute local clarifications and powerful general assessments. There are even, at this relatively late date, significant discoveries of a factual nature. The result is a full sense of the indissoluble connections between Eliot's life and his poetry. It is a deeply meditated and brilliantly realized inquiry into an important moment in the literary history of our own century."

The Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science

BEAUTIFUL SWIMMERS. Watermen, Crabs and the Chesapeake Bay. *By William W. Warner. Little, Brown and Company. $10.*

Citation: "A book largely devoted to the vagaries of *Callinectes sapidus*, the edible blue crab, seems hardly destined to win a wide and appreciative audience. Yet William Warner has written with such first-hand knowledge and affection for the 'beautiful swimmers' (as their genus translates from the Greek), and for the Chesapeake watermen who catch them, that his book will surely attract an enthusiastic following. The whole natural history of the blue crab is here, plus serious lessons of ecology and even some anthropology. Warner has a sensitive ear for the picturesque dialect of the humble fisherfolk of Eastern Maryland. He has written sympathetically of their way of life, producing a delightful account of crabbing, crabbers, and crabs in the Chesapeake Bay."

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Books

The Closet Conservatives

MARTIN MAYER

About a dozen years ago, J. H. Plumb introduced the first volume of a projected series of historical studies with the comment that "the condition of man now is superior to what it was." Plumb could scarcely have imagined that anyone would quarrel with that statement, for by every reasonable historiographical criterion it was—and is—obviously true. Even in the most horrid slums of the tropical countries (and one must now go to tropical countries to find much garden-variety, catastrophic nineteenth-century poverty), the average resident lives longer, raises more children to maturity, suffers fewer debilitating diseases, eats a better if still inadequate diet, acts out fewer crippling superstitions, and probably feels less fear than did his parents before him.

Today the utterance of Plumb's innocuous and obvious factual statement would draw looks of incredulity and perhaps outrage, especially from the young. There is abroad in the world—not only in America—a need to believe that everything is getting worse. This is partly the result of the ahistoricism carefully cultivated in the schools by three generations of educational reformers (who now blame the outcome on television). English youngsters who thrill to a Sherlock Holmes scene set in an impenetrable London fog will talk earnestly about the worsening air pollution of a London that hasn't seen such a fog in twenty years. Even the elements of modernity that one would expect to command universal approval have become objects of scorn: Ivan Illich recently suggested that diseased teeth and yaws and suppurating scratches were really good for the noble savage of yesteryear because they taught him to bear pain gracefully.

What gives these attitudes resonance, however, is less our regret for a fictitious past than our fear of a projected future. Although there has never been a time when man did not have much to be frightened about—especially as an individual who owes life a death—ours is indeed a period of new hazards. Global population certainly cannot double every twenty-seven years without creating catastrophe, and the prediction that energy use would keep doubling every decade was never the tiding of simple joy that the futurologists thought. The weaponry remains unthinkable. We have invented new pollutants and are devising new bacteria, processes that inevitably occur before the development of credible controls. "Certainty generally is an illusion," said Justice Holmes, "and repose is not the destiny of man"; but the degrees of uncertainty with which we now live are at least a little uncomfortable for almost everyone. Confidence that things are getting worse can guarantee against disappointment, and gives the young justification for their natural resentments toward a world that, by definition, they never made.

The prevalence of such sentiments explains the success of E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*—a success quite unexpected by its publisher, who first issued the book in 1973 as a trade paperback in a limited printing. As of late 1976, the book had sold 300,000 copies and was still gaining, finding strong acceptance on college campuses and in the State Apart-

MARTIN MAYER is the author of *The Bankers, The Lawyers, The Schools*, and, most recently, *Today and Tomorrow in America*.

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ment of the governor of California. Schumacher, a German-born, Oxford-trained economist in his sixties, has spent the postwar years advising a collection of rather unsuccessful organizations, from the National Coal Board in Britain to the government of Burma. He is the founder of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, a foundation-sponsored research center that has been trying—apparently without much success—to invent efficient labor-intensive production processes for societies where machines rather than people are in short supply. The book is a peculiar performance, some of it interesting and cogently (if rather abstractly) argued, some of it highly emotional, uninformed, and self-contradictory to the point of incoherence. Unfortunately, the latter sections seem to have drawn for the book its following.

Schumacher's serious argument is the Club of Rome thesis dequantified. The productive accomplishments of modern society, he claims, rest less upon human effort and genius than upon the temporarily easy accessibility of nonrenewable natural resources (especially energy resources). We are not living on our income and increasing our capital, as we think, but eating into the "capital" of the earth. Thus the prosperity of the advanced societies lacks "permanence" (a favorite word: "nature" has "permanence"), and the little poor countries questing for a Western European standard of living are following a Pied Piper. The mountain that will swallow them up is urbanization, a bad thing at best (no city should ever be home to more than half a million people), and for poor countries an inevitable source of unemployment, wasted labor, and wasted lives.

The nonmodernized two-thirds of the world should be seen as "two million villages" with roughly a thousand inhabitants apiece, and aid from the rich to the poor should be directed toward helping those inhabitants improve the life they can make for themselves with the available local resources. Comparative advantage is a fallacy, and trade is essentially bad. In "Buddhist economics," which Schumacher invents and admires, "production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life, while dependence on imports from afar and the consequent need to produce for export to unknown and distant peoples is highly uneconomic and justifiable only in exceptional cases and on a small scale." You do the poor no kindness when you give them the most advanced equipment. They probably won't be able to use it properly; if they do, it will be only by a slavish imitation that is the worst and most inescapable form of neocolonialism.

At the same time, the inherited technology of primitive agriculture and village industry is clearly inadequate to people's needs. The sympathetic adviser from the modernized world must therefore study the existing techniques of the village, then ask himself what improvements he would want if he were a villager, and only then apply to the problem his superior understanding of production processes. The result should be an "intermediate technology" that will enable his beneficiaries to escape from poverty without escaping from the village or its religio-cultural traditions.

A lot of this is appealing, and plausible on first sight, though not always on consideration. Schumacher notes the old saw that you help a man more if you teach him fishing than if you give him fish—and expands it to argue that you help him more if you teach him to make his own fishing tackle than if you give him the equipment. But what if he's a carpenter and would rather sell chairs for cash and buy fish? Do we really have to do without the productivity of the division of labor to practice Schumacher's "economics as if people mattered"? Worse—what if this white man's burden and his family are hungry right now? It takes time to make fishing tackle.

When Schumacher suggests that instead of sending bulldozers to build a road we teach natives about wheelbarrows and help them create the back-up shops they will need to make wheelbarrow parts, what he is really saying is that these fellows don't need that road for another generation. (He doesn't like roads anyway; they're part of the damnable modern transportation technology that makes men "footloose.") These people may not have that much time—they certainly don't think they do. For all his insistence on the need to take a dynamic view and relate the parts of the problem, Schumacher ignores entirely the impact of public health technologies that, by reducing the death rate,

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created a population explosion. Neither cultures nor technologies come as snap-together independent parts; we are dealing with conflicts not of technique or attitude, but of commitment.

The desire to believe Schumacher is ultimately eroded by his bad manners as a controversialist (he is forever putting into the mouths of unnamed antagonists things nobody worth arguing with would ever say, like "People talk freely about 'machines to foretell the future' "), and by an astonishing absence of specificity. *Small Is Beautiful* does not offer a single example of the recommended "intermediate technology" or, as its author coyly puts it, "technology with a human face." (Lord knows what that is supposed to mean, other than "good.") The book offers only one incident drawn from life, with a specific problem to solve, a specific tactic for solving it, and a specific result—and this incident, strangely, involves the creation by the National Coal Board of a reporting form that compelled the managers of local collieries to abandon unprofitable small veins of coal and concentrate their efforts on the main face.

Schumacher ventures some nice *aperçus*. My favorite is the observation that if Germany had conquered Denmark in the 1860s or if Napolean had not been forced from Belgium, we would now regard an independent Denmark or Belgium as nonviable, and Danish or Belgian separatist movements as foolishly romantic. Mostly, though, the book is rhetoric, and when dealing with contemporary life in the rich countries it is simply hysterical. "The leading ideas of the nineteenth century . . . are themselves a bad, vicious, life destroying type of metaphysics. We are suffering from them as from a fatal disease." "There can be little doubt that the whole of mankind is in mortal danger. . . ." ". . . the modern world . . . tumbles from crisis to crisis; on all sides there are prophecies of disaster and, indeed, visible signs of breakdown." ". . . actual people . . . find themselves oppressed by increasing frustration, alienation, insecurity, and so forth." (That "and so forth" is almost irresistible.) Still, Schumacher thinks we may be able to handle it. What we need is "a generous and magnanimous intellectual effort—the opposite of nagging, malevolent criticism." Also "an effort of the imagination and an abandonment of fear." Bushwah.

Steady-state philosophers like Schumacher get into trouble because they claim radical credentials for an intensely conservative, even reactionary, attitude. No significant ideational or technological advance may be dreamed in their philosophies; the problems they see can be solved only by turning back. Schumacher is fairly explicit about this, concluding with a call for rededication to the cardinal virtues (in Latin, too).

A similar partially and ruefully recognized conservatism bedevils Fred Hirsch's *Social Limits to Growth*, a Twentieth Century Fund study just published by Harvard University Press and a much more interesting book because Hirsch has a more fluent and balanced mind. In the end, the need he wishes to instill in society turns out to be *noblesse oblige*, a graceful withdrawal by the Alpha element from a competition Hirsch believes has become destructive. Through this withdrawal, the best of the society would set an example of reduced expectations for all.

Though far from easy reading, *Social Limits to Growth* may enjoy considerable success, like John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. It is essentially a single-thesis book (which is not a criticism: Hirsch keeps saying so himself, in a faintly worried way), and single thesis-ism is the royal road in intellectual publishing because it gives busy critics something to whistle. Like Rawls, Hirsch finds more to do with his thesis than can be imagined from a bald statement of it. But because the Hirsch thesis is analytical rather than prescriptive, it is subject to reality testing as the Rawls thesis is not; and the results of such testing are rather alarming.

Historically, Hirsch argues, competition for the good things of the world has been beneficial because (vide Adam Smith) the process has created more good things than the winners can consume. But the good things people really prize—leadership functions, second homes on the shore, easy commuting by private car—are inherently limited (and here Hirsch pays his rather surprised devoir to the conservatives of the nineteenth century). As affluence apparently brings such rewards within reach of more and more

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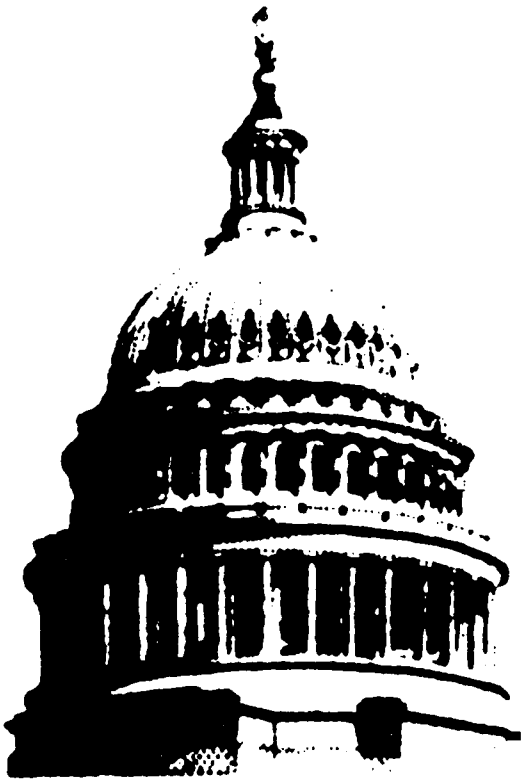

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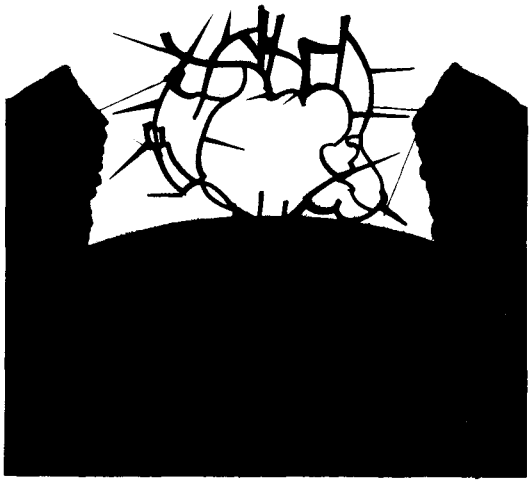

The Poems of Edward Taylor

edited by Donald E. Stanford
with a Foreword by Louis L. Martz

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people, the goal of competition becomes "position." This is not just a zero-sum game in which someone must lose for anyone else to win; it is actually a negative-sum game, because men striving as individuals sacrifice the goods they could gain if they acted in concert. Individual competition is of necessity shortsighted. Western man rolls downhill toward Garrett Hardin's tragedy of the commons, the ruinous overgrazing that occurs because each individual does in fact follow his own self-interest, narrowly conceived, when he adds his cow to the herd being fed for free. The result is pervasive, souring disappointment.

The examples Hirsch gives are mostly familiar: the crowding, dirt, and crime that follow families from the city to their new homes in the suburbs, the traffic jams on the expressways, the mobs on the beach (and the inability of the homeowner to keep strangers off "his" beach). An income not just absolutely but even relatively high enough to have assured domestic help in the old days now leaves the successful man clearing the table himself, or worse. Education that once guaranteed status and occupation to the credential-holder now drops the graduate into the labyrinthine rat race. (The best statement of this phenomenon is probably still the first half of the Mike Nichols movie *The Graduate*, which Hirsch does not cite; perhaps significantly, he draws none of his illustrations from popular culture.)

Now, this thesis is true only from the narrow perspective of the upper middle class. "The first thing one wants to know about the vice-president of a bank or business corporation," Hirsch writes, "is how many others there are." This is not, however, the first question—or even the last question—asked by a truck driver whose son has made it to that status, or by his friends at the corner bar and grill. The man whose own parents never took him out to the beach at all is not disgusted by the fact that the beach to which he takes his children may be crowded. Most of Great Neck would seem a disaster to the people who lived there in Scott Fitzgerald's time, but the people who live there now like it well enough. Maybe they shouldn't, but they do.

Hirsch laments that the discount house that sells best-sellers cheaply drives the better-stocked bookstore out of business, that people would prefer better-stocked bookstores, but that the choice is not available under conditions of competition. Problems like these, he says, are never faced. But in fact they are faced, and managed, all the time. Insurance companies are not permitted to restrict their coverage to only the best risks; telephone service and electric power are priced to make the city dweller carry the costs of serving the farmer; the Justice Department or the FTC is in court every day to keep the more efficient producer from exploiting the market power his efficiency gives him. On the specific issue, we go through periodic wrangles over fair trade laws to preserve neighborhood stores from "predatory pricing" by larger competitors. The opponents of such legislation have been winning these wars lately, mostly because Hirsch's observations are wrong: the number of bookstores does not diminish, and the number of book titles published seems to increase, God save us, despite the activities of the discounters.

In any event, since most people are most interested in best-sellers, they will prefer a system that gives them what they want for less. There is a case to be made for the argument that society should be organized so that minorities will more often get what they want at the expense of the majority—but not in Hirsch's context of insistence that modern capitalist society has lost moral authority because it cannot adjust to mounting demands for equality. Perhaps the time has come to acknowledge that popular opinion considers economic distribution unjust in countries like Britain, where both Hirsch and Schumacher work, and where 60 percent of the national product is now allocated by political process—not in countries like the United States and West Germany, where only 30 to 40 percent is allocated by government.

Classical socialist doctrine holds that each should contribute according to his abilities and receive according to his needs—but, as Benjamin Cardozo suggested half a century ago, this is the prescription of charity, not of justice. In popular opinion, at least, justice demands that each should receive according to his contribution. Deciding on the value of individual contributions is indeed, as Hirsch

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insists, a difficult task in modern conditions of monopoly power and unionization, but it is duck soup beside the task of deciding the dimensions of individual need. "He who does not work shall not eat" was the slogan of the populist Left (and the original Soviet constitution), not of the capitalist Right.

The cat comes out of Hirsch's bag toward the end, when he defines the "positional jobs," for which competition is counterproductive, as those "at or near the pinnacle of professions and within business." But positional competition in the real world, as we all experience it, is *political* competition; it is the fellows running for office who give us the zero-sum game or worse. The strictures Hirsch offers against the operation of the market economy (even after he assumes it to work better than it does) apply even more strongly to the politically dominated economy he recommends.

In a sense there are no answers to the conundrums posed by Schumacher and Hirsch. As the economists who replied to the Club of Rome insisted, increasing scarcity of nonrenewable resources will drive up their prices, thus reducing their use and waste—but economic systems do not work on time horizons long enough to push up the prices now of materials that will become urgently scarce only in fifty years. In the divided world of political discussion (Schumacher's home: he has a Manichaean view of life and considers everything to be composed of opposites), the rejection of market principles implies the adoption of governmental principles—but elected governments are likely to operate on time horizons even lower than those of private industry.

Hirsch's positional competition is a far less fundamental difficulty, because *from the point of view of those ascending the status ladder* it is really not that hard to create additional satisfying positions. To the extent that the valued status in contemporary society is that of the celebrity (the person, as Daniel Boorstin put it, who is well known for his well-knownness), the media can generate the stuff overnight. But the view from the top is nearly as dreary as Hirsch says, and the health of our political and artistic life may depend upon the confidence and good spirits of that upper middle class which loses both real rewards and nerve as positional distribution becomes relatively more equal.

What both books boil down to is a statement that we now have problems we don't know how to solve. On consideration, this should be neither surprising nor frightening. Time has a way of redefining the questions. Look how the concern over Megalopolis, the elephantine growth of the Washington-Boston corridor, has transmuted to concern over the draining-off of people and activity from the northeast. The next generation will have better tools (at worst, the results of our experience) with which to make the brave new world.

One aspect of both books is depressing, however: their emphasis on envy as a prime mover in modern society. If youthful insistence on fairness is in truth a mask for envy, not much will be learned from even the most suggestive experience. Myself, I think their emphasis derives from the study, not of the world at large, but of England, and envy is a big chunk of what's wrong with England. Whatever the reason for it, the emphasis on envy explains the musty strength of the conservatism that emerges unbidden from the closet when these presumably socialist books begin to discuss the benefits to be gained from socialism. Under socialism, it turns out—and this may even be true—people will know their place.

White of the Rueful Countenance

LETTERS OF E. B. WHITE. *Collected and edited by Dorothy Lobrano Guth. Harper & Row. $15.*

Reviewed by SPENCER BROWN

If men will impartially, and not asquint, look toward the offices and function of a poet, they will easily conclude to themselves the impossibility of any man's being the poet, without first being a good man.

—Ben Jonson

SPENCER BROWN is a retired high school English teacher and principal. He has published two volumes of poetry, *My Father's Business* and *Looking into the Fire*.

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I sound as though I were contemptuous of poets; the fact is I am jealous of them. I would rather be one than anything.

—E. B. White

It is a defensible paradox to describe E. B. White as a poet. He writes nimble verse, he is a good man, and he is often poetical in his prose. Now he invites us to look over his whole accomplishment; White would never call it his oeuvre: "I seldom use a word or phrase borrowed from any language except English (because I don't know any other language)." The occasion is the publication of his letters, at a time when he and his wife are fortunately still around to help the editor, although White apologizes for being still alive: "Ideally, a book of letters should be published posthumously." Readers who have admired and loved his pictures of farm life, his incomparable books for children, and his phrases mingling the unexpected and the inevitable, will be equally delighted by the letters.

They would not find me changed from him they knew—
Only more sure of all I thought was true.

And here we are back in poetry.

White is a sort of prose Frost. Like Frost, he would choose to be a plain New England farmer—

With an income in cash of, say, a thousand
(From, say, a publisher in New York City).

He would differ in being much richer. From the twenties on, he was permanently, if loosely, attached to *The New Yorker*. He augmented a good salary by writing extra pieces for it and other magazines, and by collaborating with Thurber on *Is Sex Necessary?* (a book that made his father "ashamed"). *The New Yorker,* financially sickly in the lush twenties, began to flourish during the depression. White and his wife, Katharine, who was a tower of strength and a pillar of sanity in the magazine's sedulously cultivated chaos, were always comfortably off.

He differs from Frost, too, in being a willing rather than a reluctant farmer. He obviously loves pigs, sheep, the birthing of lambs, the brooding of hens and geese, the preparation of incubators, the digging out of rocks. He loves boats, calling himself more brave than skillful as a sailor. He endures cheerfully the attention of several generations of dogs—dogs of investigative and panhandling ways and low morality. Over and over in his letters he announces his immediate retirement from *The New Yorker;* he is going back to Maine and will do nothing but farm. Three months afterward, he is in active correspondence with Harold Ross and lesser editors. Six months later, the letters erupt from a city address or from *The New Yorker* office. But even then, he sees himself as a small-town boy who now lives on a farm and really farms it.

It is a genuine pose, whose roots are in solid reality and among whose advantages are the ability to view an urban or national or international problem with new eyes and a sometimes embarrassing honesty. Yet in E. B. White it is the style that matters, not the ideas. There is practically nothing in White's collected work to disturb his audience or shock a Norman Cousins. He protests the firing of the holy Hollywood Ten (that decalog-rolling required for good standing in the liberal lodge), but he is under no illusions about the possible reform or future beneficence of Communist countries. He is distressed by contamination (he seems not to use the word *pollution*) but believes Eisenhower's decision to resume bomb testing was wise. He stands for total freedom of the press, as a sort of religious tenet, but he hates pornography. He refuses to join any organization and has no use for pacifists, but he would solve the problems of war and peace by instituting world government. The windmills he tilts against are huge, unreachable, and thus harmless. He is the White of the Rueful Countenance.

In all this he is the poet. Poets rarely offer us anything like an original philosophical or scientific or political discovery. They only reflect such discoveries. The true discoverers, the thinkers, are usually so excited by attaining, or blundering on, big truths that they rush their findings into equations or undistinguished prose.

White's discoveries are personal, paradoxes that assist in molding his style; in large part

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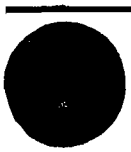

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they are his style. He has hay fever and loves haying. He is allergic to the horses that help in the haying, and he loves horses. He is specifically and unashamedly and totally American. Without vainglory he just accepts American things, the data he lives happily with. He also enjoys poking holes in American technology and pompous American verbosity. Three letters to Ross fulminate against the stapler. When Ross gives him a de-stapling machine, he continues the war, even after he must admit that the machine is better than he had a right to expect. He grants the new slick cars their mechanical perfection but hates them because he can't get into them easily and they have too little ground clearance for leaving the tar (Maine speech for "hard road"). He loves the old high cars, especially Model Ts.

In 1922 he crossed the continent in a Model T. In Louisville he became probably the only poet in history to recoup his losses at the racetrack by writing a sonnet and getting it published for twenty-five dollars in a local paper. He got a newspaper job in Seattle. When it dried up, he went to Alaska, first-class part of the way, working the rest. Although he was only twenty-three, his letters home display minute observation and descriptive humor; his style was forming.

His mature style is so much part of us that we find it hard to characterize. Some years back, a favorite English department quip was to parody the cumbrous title of a Hopkins poem with "The Blessed Thomas Stearns Eliot Compared to the Air We Breathe." Most of us could also make a case for "The Blessed Elwyn Brooks White Compared to the Air We Breathe."

White always disclaimed responsibility for *The New Yorker*. He always ostensibly deferred to Ross or Katharine White. But a careful reading of the *Letters* will reinforce the suspicion that he *was The New Yorker:* its vocabulary, its way of looking at things, its tone. He set the tone even by his manner of denying his influence, and through *The New Yorker* he was enormously influential. His gradual withdrawal from the magazine may have accelerated its current evolution toward the plantigrade-political.

Of course it is brash to discuss White's style; bat boys do not publicly analyze Ted Williams's stance and swing. But as far as we may permissibly see, the man is the style—quirky, interested in everything, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, the perfect journalist whose declared ambition is to be a journalist. He eschews connectives, but everything connects, in rhythm. It is speech rhythm with the cagey devices of classical rhetoric: repetition, understatement, hyperbole, anticlimax, climax, the withholding of information until the right word comes along to make the sentence and the information end like the fall of a hammer. Above all it is perception of the absurd, the ironic, the pathetic, the rueful. It is half unswerving honesty and half playacting, sturdy preciosity and innocent sophistication. For all its apparent ease, its parturition must be painful; White salutes the craft of writing for "the beartraps, the power, and the glory."

In praising the style of his friend Morris Bishop, White describes himself: "I like to think of those sentences turned out just right, in their little hats set jauntily on one side and their starchy shirtfronts immaculate." White is the perfection of the lapidary-colloquial. Keep the reader off-balance; never give him the word he expects. Much humor is the puncturing of pomposity, but in order to puncture it you must create it. White is a master at creating off-pomposity, like an off-rhyme.

Relentlessly contemporary and with no evident literary roots, White makes his base only in New York and on the Maine coast. He claims he never reads. But his diabolically adept parodies suggest he is a secret student of many styles. Forster, Thoreau certainly, Mencken possibly, and Stevenson possibly (although he denies having read *Aes Triplex*) may have gone into his development. Moreover, many letters sound right out of Mark Twain's *Autobiography* or, with the necessary changes in spelling and punctuation, *Huckleberry Finn*. When Huck puzzles over questions of right and wrong, he concludes, "I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this do whichever come handiest at the time." White says, "I don't pretend to know what is good, what is bad. I go by instinct."

Pose or not, the style dazzles. Like other

(*Continued on page 254*)

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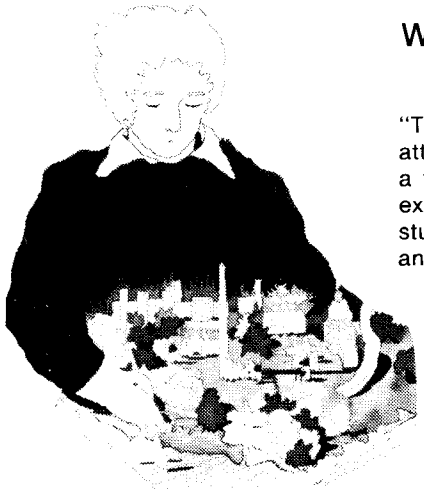

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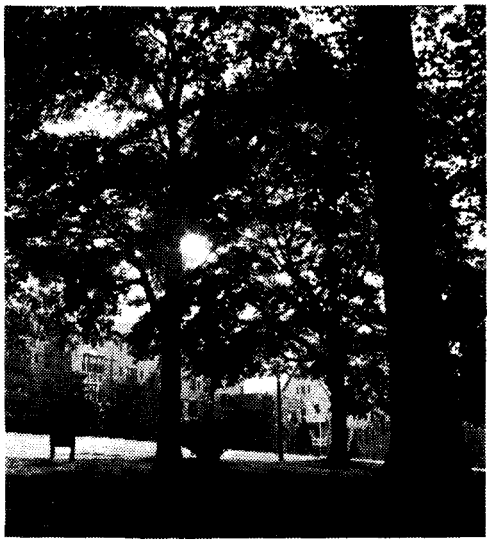

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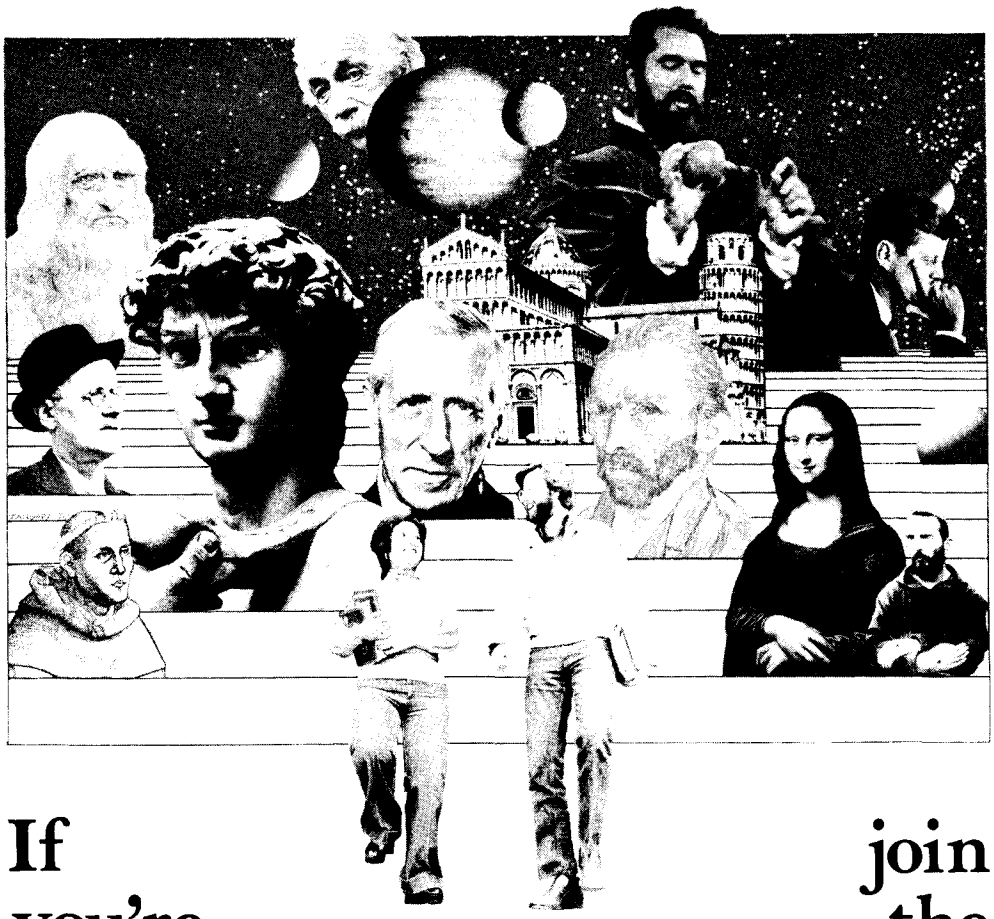

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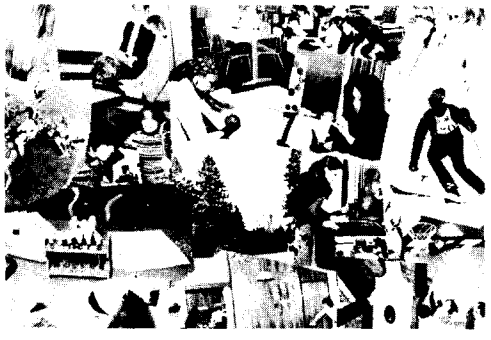

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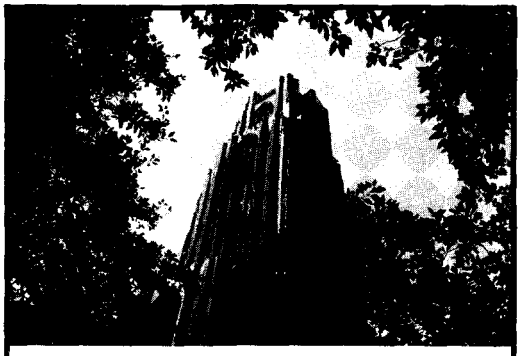

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(*Continued from page 240*)
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The Great Equalizer

SCHOOLING IN CAPITALIST AMERICA: EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF ECONOMIC LIFE. *By Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. Basic Books. $13.95.*

Reviewed by DIANE RAVITCH

For at least the past decade, the schools of the United States have been the target of attacks from all directions. They have been described as irrelevant, oppressive, stultifying, joyless institutions that crush, indoctrinate, or deaden the minds of the children forced to pass through them. The wonder of it is that parents, after being exposed to this barrage of scathing criticism, continue to subject their children to the experience of schooling.

Discontent with the schools, particularly the public schools, has had a long and varied tradition in this country. Religious groups have frequently feared the subversion of their values and the promotion of an atheistic civil religion in the public schools. Liberals have complained bitterly that the schools have failed to realize their democratic pretensions, while conservatives have worried that altogether too many of those pretensions were being realized.

What may be new about the most recent wave of criticism is the despairing, almost nihilistic tone of much of it. The optimistic hopes of some educational reformers that the schools could lead the way to radical social reconstruction have been replaced by the obverse belief that the schools, having reacted so sluggishly to the reform demands of the 1960s, can do nothing. The sense of imminence, the calls to the barricades have given way to sober reflections on the deflation of the student movement and the free school movement.

Americans have always placed a heavy burden of expectations on the schools they support, and many of these expectations are contradictory. In the political realm, the push-pull between excellence and equality has been a central theme and a source of great ambivalence in the ideology of American public schools. On the one hand, the schools are expected to provide a path for upward mobility, a means for the able to rise above their social origins and to achieve recognition through their own efforts. This is, of course, a meritocratic view, synonymous with the goal of equal opportunity. But, on the other hand, the schools are expected to equalize society by fairly dispersing intelligence and ability. In the egalitarian view, schooling equitably distributed should abolish the distinctions of wealth and knowledge that cause vast inequities among people. During the era of sputnik, the meritocratic function of the schools was stressed, and the schools of America mobilized to identify and nurture their most gifted pupils. During the past decade, "tracking" and other programs benefiting the ablest have been disparaged as elitist and un-American. "Mainstreaming"—mixing students of all abilities, even those with handicaps—is now the dominant trend, to prevent any student from getting the undemocratic idea that he is smarter, dumber, or otherwise different from other students.

The existence of this paradoxical core makes American education a ready target for those who wish to attack the schools for failing to live up to their historic ideals. And the critics are free to point out which ideals the schools have failed to live up to. In our own period, the critics are radical, and their charge is that the liberal ideal of equality of opportunity has been a democratic-sounding refuge for elitists and bigots. Were equal opportunity achieved, social rewards would be distributed on the basis of merit, but radicals hold that the determination of merit is so class biased and race biased that the outcome is stacked on behalf of white middle-class males.

Samuel Bowles's and Herbert Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* is the Marxist version of the radical critique of American education. The authors explain the collapse of the school reform movement as inevitable,

DIANE RAVITCH is a historian of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and author of *The Great School Wars: New York City 1805–1973.*

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given the subordinate relationship of schools to the oppressive capitalist economy. They contend that the schools successfully perform an "integrative" function, preparing youth for their adult roles while failing to further egalitarianism or full human development.

"Education over the years has never been a potent force for economic equality," they write. Why is it, they ask, that family background continues to have as much influence over educational attainment as it did thirty years ago? Why is it that "the substantial equalization of educational attainments over the years has not led measurably to an equalization in income among individuals"? They maintain that inequality is transmitted from generation to generation, not by superior genes or superior ability, but by the "structure of production and property relations" under capitalism. A major role of the educational system is "in hiding or justifying the exploitative nature of the U.S. economy." Specifically, the schools prepare youth for "the undemocratic and class-based character of economic life in the United States." Schools reproduce the class structure by teaching students to accept relationships of dominance and subordinance, fragmenting them into stratified status groups by race, sex, and social class and producing "reserve armies of skilled labor," all under the rubric of the "technocratic-meritocratic" ideology of equal opportunity.

The attitude of Bowles and Gintis toward the United States economic system is the key to their analysis. As Marxists they find it "highly dictatorial," "profoundly undemocratic," "autocratic," and "formally totalitarian," because "the actions of the vast majority (workers) are controlled by a small minority (owners and managers)." It is, furthermore, typified by "the hierarchical division of labor and bureaucratic authority" and systematically stratified by "race, sex, education, and social class." Hierarchy, bureaucracy, and social stratification are utilized by capitalists to stabilize this "totalitarian system of economic power." Since economic inequality and social injustice are systemic to capitalism, and since the educational system serves the needs of the capitalist order, educational policy is an ineffectual lever of change. Most people, they claim, "view their jobs as, at best, a painful necessity." The spread of corporations and bureaucracies has turned white-collar workers into a new proletariat, as alienated and powerless as assembly-line workers. The only historical analogies they can find for our present form of capitalist hierarchical control are "the Southern slave-plantation sector" and possibly the post–Civil War sharecropping and crop-lien systems.

Not surprisingly, they find that capitalism is at the root of all our contemporary problems. "Capitalism and the 'Anxious Society' are one. Drugs, suicide, mental instability, personal insecurity, predatory sexuality, depression, loneliness, bigotry, and hatred mark the perennial fears of Americans." The only appropriate response to this monstrous set of conditions is revolution, because the American economy is "the most extensive and complete wage-labor system in the history of civilization . . . repressive and anachronistic, an obstacle to further human progress."

Bowles and Gintis insist on calling their revolution "socialist" and "democratic," but their referents are never socialist democracies like Sweden or Israel. Instead they hail the revolutionary "socialism" of such states as Russia, North Vietnam, Cuba, and China. And, while appealing to the antiauthoritarian sympathies of American radicals, they eventually advise "socialist" educators to "reject simple antiauthoritarianism and spontaneity" as insufficiently revolutionary, "barren and naïvely individualistic."

If one can ignore the musty odor of doctrinaire Marxism, there are aspects of Bowles's and Gintis's critique that are accurate and worthy of attention. And, to be sure, it is valuable and stimulating to perceive the totality of American education from a Marxist perspective. Unfortunately, even when they document their points with solid evidence, their analysis hews so uncritically to Marxist conventionalities that the overall impression is of a one-sided polemic, whose logic is reductionist and whose questions are raised with answers in hand.

The authors are quite right to say that family background continues to influence educational attainment, which is hardly news to American social scientists (although some so-

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ciologists believe that the importance of social origins has declined). In a free society, where government is not able to penalize children from advantaged homes in favor of the disadvantaged, it is not surprising that educated parents are more likely to implant high educational aspirations in their children, and are more capable of subsidizing their schooling, than parents who have little education and low incomes. What is even more surprising, and yet is not mentioned by Bowles and Gintis, is that the same phenomenon occurs in the Soviet Union, according to recent sociological studies by scholars like Mervyn Matthews. The best places in the best schools, as well as the best grades, seem to go disproportionately to children of the highest social strata, even in the theoretically egalitarian schools of the Soviet Union.

Somewhat more complicated is the contention that the schools are not a "potent force for economic equality." Bowles and Gintis do not explore whether educational attainment contributes to economic mobility, for that relationship seems to be well established. They refer instead to income and resource equalization, to equal rewards rather than equal opportunity. Although Horace Mann, in the mid-nineteenth century, wrote of the school as society's "great equalizer," it would be difficult to demonstrate that the egalitarian concept was as consistently central to the purposes of schooling as was the idea of equal opportunity. Schooling has been, and still is—according to the recent work of Robert M. Hauser and David L. Featherman at the University of Wisconsin—an effective way to improve one's occupational standing independent of one's social origins. As Christopher Jencks has demonstrated, equal opportunity is not the same as equal results, and the best means of redistributing income is redistributing income.

Bowles and Gintis buttress their argument for the economic irrelevance of education by contending that income inequality has remained constant since 1910 (although such economists as Arthur Okun and Simon Kuznets maintain that income inequality was reduced during World War II). A different light has been cast on this issue by Morton Paglin in the *American Economic Review* for September 1975. Paglin holds that the usual concept of income equality fails to take into account that families at different stages in the life cycle have different income needs. He argues that perfect equality would mean "equal incomes for all families at the same stage of their life cycle, but not necessarily equal incomes between different age groups." Additionally, Paglin points out that the actual extent of inequality is exaggerated "by a statistical decision to exclude need-based in-kind transfers from the definition of income. As a matter of social policy, we have decided to mitigate poverty by making large transfers in the form of public housing, rent supplements, food stamps and food assistance, medicaid, and social services. . . . We then blithely exclude these transfers from the statistics on poverty and inequality and wonder about the lack of improvement in the share allotted to the lowest quintile!" Based on readjustments for age and transfer payments, Paglin finds that there has been a significant reduction in income inequality since World War II.

It is doubtful that capitalism is the independent variable in all the social and political sicknesses described by Bowles and Gintis. Bureaucracy and hierarchical control are not unique to capitalist societies; if anything, these institutional forms are even more firmly entrenched in Marxist and socialist countries. And anyone who has a passing acquaintance with the societies lauded by the authors must feel some skepticism about the claims of greater personal freedom in a Marxist "democracy."

One's credulity is ultimately strained by the gratuitous, ideological asides that pepper the book. In its historical section, the authors explain mass immigration to the United States thus: "Millions of Europeans, many of them peasants driven out of business by cheap U.S. grain imports, came to the U.S. in search of a living wage." No recognition from this quarter for the United States as a haven from religious and political persecution! The irrationality of capitalism is supposedly demonstrated with this peculiar image: "Astronauts circle the globe eating their fill, while farmers die of hunger." And one is left to ponder the authors' contention that the capitalist class exercises its control over educational policy through its foundations, in light

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of their acknowledgment of a three-year grant from the Ford Foundation that enabled them to complete the book.

Historians began to note in the early 1960s that the rhetoric and ideology of the public schools were dangerously bloated and that some readjustment of ideals to reality was in order. It may be that the pendulum of revisionism swung too far in the opposite direction, and that the time for reassessment of the role and performance of the schools is once again upon us.

Mr. Chips

THE IMMORTAL PROFESSION: THE JOYS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING. *By Gilbert Highet. Weybright and Talley, Inc. $10.*

Reviewed by WERNER J. DANNHAUSER

Gilbert Highet is a well-known classicist and Columbia professor (now emeritus). He is also the author of a dozen books that cover a wide variety of topics and that are regularly described as "urbane" and "eminently readable." Perhaps the most celebrated of his writings is *The Art of Teaching*. It appeared in 1950 and was read by many members of, and applicants to, the academic world, including this reviewer, who unfortunately remembers nothing about it except that it was well intentioned.

The present volume is not "a genuine sequel," as the author readily admits. Rather it is a "companion volume," in that it contains further reflections on the same subject. Highet has brought together a series of essays that are loosely, if at all, connected, and their origins are not described exactly. Some are obviously commencement addresses and other speeches; some—those on Gilbert Murray and Albert Schweitzer, for example—seem to be obituaries prepared for learned journals; and some appear to have been retrieved from his files where they have been languishing. These occasional pieces that vary greatly in quality help to make his book a rather disjointed artifice, and it is hard to do either justice or mercy to them in a short review.

The book does, to be sure, possess a kind of unity in that it is informed throughout by a salutary devotion to "maintaining the long, magnificent tradition of creative teaching," and in that the author's views are very much of a piece. Since these views emanate from a man with most imposing credentials—the book is dedicated "To my pupils 1932–1972"—they certainly deserve scrutiny.

Highet believes, as the subtitle suggests, that teaching and learning are inseparable and that together they constitute a way of life, "the life of the mind," that is more precious and important than is commonly realized. Yet because the author knows that good things can be difficult to attain, he is not insensitive to the hardships connected with both teaching and learning. Teachers may be worthy people, but in this vale of tears the valuable is not always valued sufficiently. Learning may be inherently pleasant, but compulsion and routinization conspire to make it painful. The rewards of education are so great, however, that the obstacles to it are eminently worth overcoming. Moreover, those who want to be teachers can be helped toward the fulfillment of their aspirations. Since teaching is an art, it can itself be taught, and the author does not hesitate to write a series of "how-to" chapters. They are full of absolutely unobjectionable advice: know your subject matter and show enthusiasm for it; control your classes gently but firmly; keep up on the latest developments in your field; cultivate regular habits; make yourself clear; be scrupulous in giving assignments and grading papers. He even presents the reader with two interesting, albeit problematic, models—Murray and Schweitzer—as well as some ruminations about both Socrates and Jesus. A firm believer in the "indomitable will," which, some might think, has seen better days, Highet is basically optimistic: the typical essay has an upbeat ending.

Summaries such as the above are inevitably

WERNER J. DANNHAUSER is professor of government at Cornell University, where he teaches political philosophy. He is the author of *Nietzsche's View of Socrates*, and is a contributor to *Commentary*, *Judaism*, the *National Review*, and the *American Political Science Review*.

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misleading, and when they deal with a collection of essays they are also inevitably unfair. One must hasten to add, therefore, that the book contains a goodly number of genuine insights, for Gilbert Highet's talents are by no means inconsiderable. These essays are unhurried, and in his leisurely digressions Highet divests himself of his share of *aperçus*—which demands the reader's gratitude. Thus he reminds us that "nobody has ever thought himself to death," that our age must be wary of the temptation to succumb to the illusions of progress, that there is a difference between prejudices and considered preferences, that we owe an incalculable debt to the man who taught young William Shakespeare, that teachers can't help getting bored once in a while, and that today's students are soaked in propaganda to an alarming extent. These and other insights may not be novel, but they are surely worth repeating, and Highet presents them quite gracefully.

The most revealing part of the book, however, is neither the pedestrian nature of the main line of its thought nor the incisiveness of some of its asides. Volumes of essays such as this are at their most illuminating in the clues they provide about the author himself—especially his general sensibility. What of the intelligence one finds at work and at play here? Unfortunately, in *The Immortal Profession*, it is unlikely a discerning reader will come up with a very positive answer.

The plain and sad fact is that an aura of the second-rate enshrouds this little book. Gilbert Highet continually casts himself in the role of the urbane scholar, but he is not all that good at playing the part. For one thing, he shows no signs of being an impressive scholar. What he says about his own field of expertise, classics, almost never goes beyond the entirely conventional and is sometimes quite dubious as well. For example, he writes, without further ado or argument, that "Aristotle's *Politics* is not so much a book as a collection of treatises." That judgment is almost certainly based more on Jaeger's reading of Aristotle than on a careful consideration of the text itself. More important, it completely ignores other persuasive interpretations of *Politics* as an organic whole. Then, too, in comparing Socrates with Jesus, Highet presents the reader with a philosopher who invariably argues gently with his disciples, neglecting the fact that Socrates called Xenophon a fool and a wretch.

It would be easy enough to cite other instances of this kind, but they might all be rejected as mere nitpicking. Urbane scholars are hard to take to task because their urbanity shields their lack of profundity. What does a dubious judgment—or even an outright blunder—matter, after all? The scholar-as-gentleman succeeds if he brings off the appearance of bearing his learning gracefully. The trouble is that Gilbert Highet does not quite bring it off. His footnotes are, as often as not, ostentatious rather than informative; his erudition is forever trailing off into mere bookishness; and his wit is incurably donnish—as when he writes of students, "I will not say that they are revolting; but they are rebellious." Clichés abound ("a good teacher will be a man who is happy when he is alone in the library"), and sheer silliness and tastelessness spread like a fungus. Thus it is, without doubt, foolish to label politics "the most difficult and unrewarding of all occupations" when referring to none other than Winston Churchill; it is nonsense to suggest that "Goethe had no interest in Christianity"; and it is both trivial and vulgar to remark on a "reproachful comment" by Jesus to his disciples during the Last Supper that it could scarcely have come at a "more painfully inappropriate time."

Because of such failures, and others, *The Immortal Profession* makes a negligible contribution toward the articulation of a really grave problem: the fate in our time of education in general and—Highet's special domain—liberal education in particular. For one thing, the author himself is not an impressive enough example of the truly cultivated man. He correctly connects liberal education, the education befitting free men, with reverence for the great books, but his own stance toward them can be quite cavalier. Moreover, his writing indirectly conveys the suggestion that the great books are to be read not so much because they are profound as because they give one a certain polish.

Second, and more important, Highet does not seem sufficiently aware that the total crisis of our time necessarily involves a total crisis in education. In fact, he suggests that all

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times are equally critical: the outlook in 1964 is neither better nor worse than was the outlook in 1864, or, for that matter, in 64 A.D. He is in favor of the Great Tradition of Western Civilization but is an inadequate defender of it, being insufficiently aware that the tradition is endangered by both internal decay and external attack. Highet's platitudes reflect the former, and the vehement attack on the center by Marx and Nietzsche reflects the latter. Highet has very little to say about either of these men; he seems oblivious not only to the profundity of their respective critiques of Western civilization but to their threat to what he considers the eternal verities.

It is sad to have to report on the shortcomings and ultimate failures of this book because Gilbert Highet is, in his middlebrow way, a distinguished man. The reader of his latest effort can scarcely help feeling that the author is a soldier on the right side. It is easy to see that his heart is in the right place, but it is difficult to say the same thing about his mind.

Knowing One's Place

THE NATURE OF MAPS: ESSAYS TOWARD UNDERSTANDING MAPS AND MAPPING. *By Arthur H. Robinson and Barbara Bartz Petchenik. University of Chicago Press. $8.95.*

Reviewed by BRIAN HAYES

Lost in the woods: you unfold a map, a representation of the wilderness, and strike for home. But how do you discover the correspondence between representation and reality? How do you find your own position on the map? Having found it, how do you establish some mutual orientation between the map, yourself, and the territory, so that home has a known direction? These are cognitive tasks of surprising complexity; if they cannot be accomplished, the map is useless, a mere paper wilderness. The problem is somewhat like that of using a dictionary to find the spelling of a word. Where do you start, and when you've found the word how can you be certain it's the right one? A dictionary, however, is a one-dimensional map; a real map has at least two dimensions and hence is far more complicated.

In spite of the difficulties, the apparent circularities, most of us can find the spelling of a word in a dictionary, and most of us can find our way through unfamiliar terrain with the help of a map. Arthur H. Robinson and Barbara Bartz Petchenik argue that this competence is deceptive; just because we know how to use maps, they say, this doesn't mean we understand maps. They are at pains to demonstrate the special properties of a map as an instrument of communication.

When considered merely as an object, a map seems fairly straightforward. Definitions usually begin by postulating a one-to-one correspondence between the points on the paper and the points of the territory mapped. In more abstract terms, the map defines coordinates that express formally the particularity of space; each point is named, uniquely identified. Even at this level of description, there are inadequacies; for example, the contributions of map symbols and of projective geometry have not been considered. What is more important, however, is that even a comprehensive description in these terms could define only the relation between the map and the territory. Robinson and Petchenik ask that we also consider the relations between the map and the viewer and between the viewer and the territory. Finally, we might give some thought to the possible effects of errors on the map, and to the inevitable discrepancies between the perceptions of the cartographer and those of the map reader.

A map for someone who is lost in the woods is presumably a topographic map, a species closely related to (but usually more beautiful than) the gas-station road map. The road map itself is probably the most familiar kind, although it is also one of the more abstract and highly stylized maps. (No one believes the state of New Jersey actually looks like that tangled fishnet of red and blue and black!) There are many other map types. Thematic maps represent the variation of some measured quantity—population, income, the incidence of plague—with respect to location. Maps can be constructed so that distance corresponds not to distance in the real world but to some other variable, such as travel time.

BRIAN HAYES is an editor on the staff of *Scientific American.*

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On certain military maps an entire landscape is reduced to an array of numbers. Further afield, there are maps of the moon, maps of the brain, maps of the living cell. The blueprints for the chip of etched silicon that runs an electronic calculator could be regarded as a particularly elaborate map, and so could the silicon chip itself.

The most conspicuous property common to all these graphic devices is multidimensionality. They are all spatial arrays, and their format seems somehow to facilitate access to the information embedded in them. Suppose you are given a list of ten cities, together with all the distances between them, taken two cities at a time. Such a list of distances (for ten cities there are forty-five of them) uniquely specifies the arrangement of the cities on a plane; it supplies enough information to draw a map. Without the map, working from the list of numbers alone, it would be all but impossible to visualize the cities' relative positions. A glance at the map gives all the distances between pairs, and gives much more—an image. Robinson and Petchenik observe that people make and use maps in order "to discover (by seeing) meaningful physical or intellectual shape organizations in the milieu, *structures that are likely to remain hidden until they have been mapped*" (their italics). It's the seeing that is the tricky part.

In attempting to understand how it is that maps yield up their information, Robinson and Petchenik set out in several directions at once. They consider the contributions of information theory, as formulated by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, and conclude—too hastily, I think—that it has little to offer. They discuss the epistemological ideas of Susanne K. Langer and Michael Polanyi and find them illuminating but less than explanatory. What they find most useful is the work of Jean Piaget and his colleagues on how children acquire the concept of spatial relation. It comes as no surprise, of course, that the psychology of perception should be a central discipline in the study of maps and how we read them. Unfortunately, the strongest conclusion that can be supported by this work is something of a disappointment: it seems that we understand maps because maps reflect in some way the organization of information in the brain. That's good to know, but one longs for a more detailed map of that maplike organization.

Robinson and Petchenik suggest that their thin book (138 pages) be regarded only as a preliminary foray into the theory of mapping. One of their objectives is simply to point out that maps, considered as a system of communication, deserve more scholarly attention than they have received. What Robinson and Petchenik have supplied is an outline of work yet to be done.

They have also provided a reminder of the importance of knowing one's place. It is quite extraordinary, and not widely appreciated, that each of us goes through a lifetime with an almost continuous sense of location. "Lost" long ago ceased to be a mere metaphor for desperation; the several meanings of the word together suggest that to be misplaced is to be absent entirely, dead. The need to ask "Where am I?" is a classical, definitive sign of terror or insanity. Ordinarily we pay little attention, but we are always aware of position and prepared to revise coordinates, to consult a mental map or a whole atlas of mental maps. We are constant navigators.

They Walked a Long Mile

THE U.S. CAMEL CORPS: AN ARMY EXPERIMENT. *By Odie B. Faulk. Oxford University Press. $9.75.*

Reviewed by PAUL A. ZAHL

Camels first evolved in North America, where forty million years ago they were grazers on the central plains. Then, for reasons obscure to present-day ecologists, the family *Camelidae* vanished from the continent, but not before some of its members had wandered across the northern land bridge into Asia and thence to Africa, where they adapted to desert life. Others sought the high

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ranges of South America to become shaggy llamas and alpacas. How astonishing to learn that in 1856 the camel strode once again in the land of its evolutionary nativity. Responsible for this curious homecoming was the United States Army. The circumstances are detailed by Oklahoma State University's historian Odie B. Faulk.

Faulk relates how, in the early-to-mid-1800s, the desert regions of our Southwest—lacking navigable rivers, roads, rails—were inaccessible except to a few hardy explorers, prospectors, traders, and maverick pioneers. To protect them from themselves and from hostile Apaches and Comanches, and hoping also to lay down a southern wagon route to the Far West, the army established a chain of stockaded forts across the wastelands. Supplying these remote outposts turned out to be a matter of some severity, with transport dependent almost wholly on horses, oxen, and a multitude of brash little mules. Of the homely horse-donkey hybrid, one contemporary wrote: "Man needed a straight-out servant . . . so God built him the mule."

Any such theological acceptance of the mule, along with its quadruped colleagues, was questioned by a few heretics alive to the fact that on the deserts of North Africa and western Asia the camel had for centuries reigned as key transport vehicle. Why not, for strictly military purposes, they argued, introduce some of these gifted ruminants to the American Southwest to help, perhaps eventually to supplant, the traditional horse, ox, and mule? The camel had long been ritually hailed by Bedouins as *Ata Allah* (God's Gift), and popularly apotheosized as "ship of the desert." One enthusiast in 1843 claimed: "For strength of carrying burthens, for patient endurance of labor, and privation of food, water & rest, and in some respects for speed also, the camel and dromedary . . . are unrivalled among animals."

The assessment bore elements of extravagance, but it served to fire up certain romanticists in Washington, including Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. In 1855 Davis managed to convince a wary Congress to approve a modest appropriation for testing the camel's feasibility in Texas and desert regions farther west. Arrangements immediately got under way for the army to dispatch a ship to lands of

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the eastern Mediterranean, where a cargo of dromedaries (one hump) and Bactrians (two humps) was to be purchased and transported to the Texas coast. Apparently no one chose to heed the biblical admonition: "Ye blind guides . . . which swallow a camel."

The project involved drawn-out haggling with Arab traders, irksome provisioning problems, violent storms at sea during which lumbering bodies required restraining straps, unfamiliar camel ailments, males in rut turning vicious and intractable. To be sure, the ship carried several experienced Arab drovers, but difficulties nevertheless plagued the long voyage home. One marvels that the singular ark ever got through the Mediterranean, let alone across the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. Some camels died en route, but when the shipload arrived on May 14, 1856, at Indianola on the Texas coast, they numbered thirty-four, exactly one more than at departure, for there had been several births on board. A second voyage the following year brought an additional forty-one camels to Texas.

A sizable herd was at last on New World soil, but it made few friends. Horses and mules stampeded and screamed at the sight and the fearful stench of the ungainly immigrants. Local drovers, familiar only with the habits of horses and mules, came to loathe the camels for their spitting, biting, and cantankerous behavior. On the other hand, Texans were impressed by the four- to six-hundred-pound loads the camel could carry so swiftly, although the humps made rigging difficult; and they gaped at camels munching thorny desert plants shunned by both horse and mule. Homesteaders fenced in by hedges of live prickly pear might find their botanic barricades consumed overnight by omnivorous strays.

Faulk devotes page after meticulous page to the camel's wary adaptation, to the trials of a camel caravan making its historic first trip from Texas to California. The story ends almost anticlimactically, for just as the army was about to signal the mission's success, the Civil War engulfed the land and Texas seceded from the Union. But what really broke the camel's back were the clank of steel and the chug of locomotives as railroad builders to the east reached across the continent in their mechanical assault on distance and, eventually, the desert. The first transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, was the death knell for Operation Camel.

One by one, supporters and personnel of the U.S. Camel Military Corps lost their enthusiasm or diverted it to other pursuits. The herd disintegrated. Individual animals were sold at public auction for hauling salt, wood, and cotton and for exhibition in circuses and sideshows; others escaped to inspire legends of survival that persist to this day. For a time the postal service around San Antonio kept a few camels as mail carriers. But inevitably North America's nineteenth-century *Camelidae* were vitiated to extinction—a doleful reminder of their ancestors' fate forty million years earlier.

This book is first-rate historical lore, written with the care for detail and documentation expected of a scholarly historian. The style is straightforward, unembroidered, simple. That the narrative is somewhat lacking in literary nuance should be cited but forgiven: the author's aim is not primarily to dramatize a bizarre experiment that failed, but to spell out a precise footnote to the history of our wild, turbulent, expanding nineteenth-century Southwest.

Some forty historic photographs, prints, and engravings decorate the book; and there is a well-annotated bibliography.

Somersaulting Reality

THE AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH. *By Gabriel García Márquez. Translated from the Spanish by Gregory Rabassa. Harper & Row. $10.*

Reviewed by MARTIN KAPLAN

"My mental makeup is ideological and I can't get away from it—nor do I try or want to," García Márquez once said in an interview. The bleak lunar landscape of literary works inspired by such ideological commitments—from the tramp, tramp, tramp

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of socialist realism to the banal didacticism of putative mass art—should be warning enough to any writer tempted to make aesthetics the servant of politics. So at first glance it came as an enchanting surprise that *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the novel by this committed leftist journalist, depicted neither the oppression of the masses nor the terrible beauties of revolutionary violence, but instead quickly took its rightful place among the masterworks of contemporary literature. García Márquez was compared favorably, and quite properly, with Cervantes, Rabelais, and Melville, and his critical success was matched by a popular success that saw two million copies of the book sold in its Spanish editions alone. Rather than providing a grim catalog of imperialism's toll, rather than spray-gunning his pages with liberationist alarums, García Márquez gave us a triumph of imaginative richness—the fantastical story of Macondo, where yellow flowers rain from the air, storms last four years, eleven months, and two days, and women ascend to heaven amid the flapping of bed sheets. "In the tradition of those insanely ambitious creations which aspire to compete with reality on an equal basis," as Mario Vargas Llosa described it, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is an apotheosis of the exultation of language and fiction and literary form in their own self-reflexive sufficiency.

Indeed, so apolitical did that novel appear to many of its readers that at least one commentator, Selden Rodman, declared that the book was a virtual renunciation of politics and ideology, "the triumph of the artist over the sociologist." García Márquez, Rodman explained, "set out to write a book that would strip the pretensions from whatever calls to arms, whatever rhetorical idealisms might be left: a novel so fatalistic that all the actions of its characters during their 'hundred years of solitude' would be shown to be no more than the fulfillment of a prophecy made at the beginning that it must end in a 'fearful maelstrom of dust and rubbish.'" The internal evidence one could adduce for such a view of the book—the inescapable determinisms of blood, curses, and prophecies; the great cycles of recurrent names, conversations, and events that churn through the novel; the Borgesian mirror structures and

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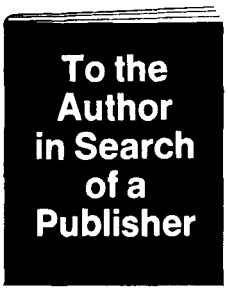

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tail swallowings that render "reality" only the most artful kind of illusion—leads one to suspect that Rodman's reading might be accurate, that whatever García Márquez's personal ideological commitments, his masterpiece avers that decisive historical action and political engagement are illusory evasions of man's tragic, albeit lusty and sometimes farcical, destiny.

The Autumn of the Patriarch, the book on which García Márquez worked for seven years after publishing the story of Macondo, underlines the gasping inadequacy of any account of his work that calls it apolitical, of any complacent assertions of the incongruence of critical thinking and poetic fantasy, and of any authoritative claim that humanism requires tragic obeisance to the icy universals of determinism, cycles, and historic inevitability. In another superb translation by Gregory Rabassa, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* tells the story of a nameless Caribbean despot who rules army, church, economy, and citizenry with an absolute murderous tyrannical hand. Like Batista in Cuba, Rojas in Colombia, and, especially, Juan Vicente Gómez in Venezuela, García Márquez's patriarch becomes vastly wealthy, bargains shrewdly and secretly with a succession of foreign nations' emissaries, manipulates elections, liquidates enemies, terrorizes intimates, exercises absolute legislative and judicial power, and creates a cult of personality whose canonical center is himself and his holy family. What is most astonishing about this brutal documentary of oppression, cheap blood, and genocide is that it is a poem: an epic poem, a fantasy, a song.

Each of the book's six chapters, or cantos, is a single long paragraph. Within each chapter there is only an occasional period and never a semicolon. What conventional punctuation there is comes from commas, and the last chapter of the book, inevitably recalling Molly Bloom and her heirs at the *Wake*, is a single long sentence. But these eccentricities of punctuation and paragraphing hardly constitute bids by García Márquez to enter the *nouveau roman* derby in which his baldly experimental Latin American contemporaries like Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante have been racing. Rather, these formal peculiarities contribute to the tacit announcement, not that García Márquez is huffing to catch up with the avant-garde, but that *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is hurtling toward the rediscovery of the aesthetic form and political sense of the ancient oral epic.

The myth told by the book describes how a Caribbean country discovered that history exists. For centuries its people had been ruled by a single tyrant whose reign of fear, blood, and literally absolute power was the eternal and unchanging axis of their lives. The story of the book is characteristically rich and bustling and fantastical, a realm that is the unmistakable creation of García Márquez. On every page, within the dazzling compression of a few lines, whole worlds of minute concrete detail are called into being, depicting daily life during the eternal dictatorship. We read of "the pale young ladies making bobbin lace with ineluctable decency among the pots of carnations and the bunches of pansies in the light of balconies," of "the checkerboard convent of the Biscayan sisters with the same harpsichord exercise at three in the afternoon with which they had celebrated the first pas-

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sage of the comet," of the "nightmare age in which gardenias had the use of reason and iguanas flew about in the darkness." The narrative structure in which we learn of these exquisitely detailed people and events is the discovery of the corpse of the dictator, the end of his timeless absolute power. Each chapter begins with the image of the citizens entering the presidential palace and finding the body of the patriarch who had ruled them for centuries, his vulture-pecked and barnacled cadaver recognizable only from its undevoured herniated testicle the size of an ox kidney. It is the decisive break with the changeless past, the stirring up of stagnant time, the awakening from a lethargy of centuries, "the music of liberation and the rockets of jubilation and the bells of glory that announced to the world the good news that the uncountable time of eternity had come to an end" that forms the context for the story of the archetypal Latin American nation where nothing ever really changes or can be changed.

To sing *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is to enact the *Just So* story of the rupture with the oppressive past. And it is toward this end that García Márquez's deployment of the epic and of the poetic are aimed. The book is told in every personal pronoun, with the "I" and "you" endlessly shifting their referents; and yet all narrators and auditors inexorably converge on "we"—we who enter the palace, we in mortal solidarity who invade the solitude of absolute power. The power of poetry is the capacity to imagine a world elsewhere, to be someone we are not, to participate in an alternative universe. When the old patriarch attends a poetry reading, García Márquez slyly describes him in the shadows of the presidential box as "the invisible presence that watched over our destiny so that it would not be altered by the disorder of poetry." On the stage, the poet's "voice of marine lightning lifted him out of his place and instant and left him floating without his permission in the golden thunder of the trim trumpets of the triumphal arches of Marses and Minervas of a glory that was not his." The subversions of the poet—his ability to imitate a world that is not this one, to lift from us the manacles of our place and instant—were well known to the Plato who, in the interests of stability and order, cast the singer of epics out of the ideal state. García Márquez has rediscovered this power of subversion; his book, his poetic epic of power, is a cacophonous and sensual invitation to its readers to re-imagine and remake their universe. *Le roi est mort*, his epic announces, but he makes of its inevitable tag—*Vive le roi*—the occasion for celebrating the necessary angel of our belief in change.

The ideal novel, García Márquez said in an interview, is "an absolutely free novel, one which would perturb not only because of its political and social content, but also because of its power of penetrating reality; and better yet, because of its capacity to turn reality upside down so we can see the other side of it." *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is exactly that somersault. An intensely committed work, its ideology is that of poetry. The book stands as stunning proof that the political novel need not shake with the boot-beat of socialist realism, nor that the experimental novel need exclude its readers with a fashionable hermetic seal. Perhaps most important of all, it answers the decade-long question since *One Hundred Years of Solitude:* could García Márquez do it again? He did.

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The Reader Replies

THE READER REPLIES *carries miscellaneous comments by readers and authors on various articles that have appeared in the magazine. All communications should be addressed to: Editor,* THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1811 Q Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20009. Because of space limitations we cannot guarantee to print all letters received.*

—EDITOR

F. O. Matthiessen

I found Professor Lynn's article on F. O. Matthiessen (Winter 1976) valuable as the personal reminiscence of a noted scholar who was fortunate enough to be able to study under the most eminent, and certainly one of the most personally committed, of the rediscoverers of American literature. I found it less valuable in its repeated insistence on the "multiple ambiguities" and illogicalities" in Matthiessen's criticism and teaching which, according to Lynn, arose out of his teacher's futile attempts to reconcile his socialism with his Christianity: "When asked by students why a man who made common cause with Harry Bridges went around talking like T. S. Eliot, he generally said something not very helpful about being a socialist *because* he was a Christian." Yet what could be more helpful than the following?

> I am a Christian, not through upbringing but by conviction, and I find any materialism inadequate. I make no pretense of being a theologian, but I have been influenced by the same Protestant revival that has been voiced most forcefully in America by Reinhold Niebuhr. That is to say, I have rejected the nineteenth-century belief in every man as his own Messiah, along with the other aberrations of that century's individualism; and I have accepted the doctrine of original sin, in the sense that man is fallible and limited, no matter what his social system, and is capable of finding completion only through humility before the love of God. . . .
>
> But I would differ from most orthodox Christians today, and particularly from the tradition represented by T. S. Eliot, in that, whatever the imperfections of man, the second of the two great commandments, to love thy neighbor as thyself, seems to me an imperative to social action. Evil is not merely external, but external evils are many, and some social systems are far more productive of them than others. Thus my philosophical position is of the simplest. It is as a Christian that I find my strongest propulsion to being a socialist (*From the Heart of Europe*, 1948, p. 82).

As an extraordinarily well-read critic and scholar, who was capable of getting inside writers as well as fictional characters, and who could profit from the works of such diverse thinkers as Marx, Eliot, Berdyaev, Henry James, and Theodore Dreiser, Matthiessen often left himself vulnerable to the charge of illogicality and self-contradiction—a charge that must seem to gain further weight from the fact that he was a political leftist and a practicing member of the Episcopal church. But Matthiessen was more than the sum of his literary interests and his political and theological commitments; and if the logic of his beliefs seems out of line with our traditional expectations, we should remember that the solidity of Matthiessen's achievement lies precisely in the fact that he saw beyond the highbrow/lowbrow, paleface/redskin dichotomies announced by Brooks and his followers. The logic of Matthiessen's commitments is the logic of a sympathy and consciousness too unshielded to be contained by our traditional ideologies. As another of Matthiessen's noted students, Leo Marx, has observed: "Perhaps the most profound and elusive lesson he taught was that a smooth and absolutely logical structure of ideas is not necessarily a sign of the greatest intellectual maturity. It was here that he was closest to the tradition which runs from Emerson to the open universe of Henry James. He knew, though he could not always put it into practice, that the mind, with its categories and abstractions, always trails behind life" (*F. O. Matthiessen: A Collective Portrait*, 1950, p. 42).

RICHARD COOK
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Ladies of the Desk

Renee Winegarten says many complimentary things about my book *Literary Women*, for which I am grateful; but I cannot allow to pass her (probably unwitting) slur on a man who was the most discriminating, most supportive, most important critic of women's literature in early Victorian England.

In the opening paragraph of her review (Autumn 1976) she quotes from the 1850 article "A Gentle Hint to Writing-Women" and raps the "dreadfully arch manner" and the "waggishness" used by "the poor fellow" as a "cover for insecurity," without supplying the writer's name. He was George Henry Lewes, and the article was one of the brilliantly witty series (later treasured by George Bernard Shaw) that Lewes wrote for the *Leader* and signed "Vivian"—more than a pen name, a pose or mask of a languid, dandified, scholarly, urbane bachelor besieged by female admirers. In reality, Lewes in 1850 was a harassed, ugly, hardworking husband and father (his wife an intellectual beauty who published, and committed adultery). Lewes had already done more than anyone else to make a serious claim for George Sand's works in England; he did more to fix Jane Austen's reputation as one of the greatest of English writers. In 1847 he had hailed the author of *Jane Eyre* as a genius, and then entered upon a momentous correspondence with its pseudonymous author "Currer Bell" that affected all her subsequent literary production. Because of Lewes, Charlotte Brontë read Jane Austen for the first time; through her epistolary relationship with Lewes, she was able to debate and develop her critical theory as a novelist.

Four years after "A Gentle Hint to Writing-Women" (from which Renee Winegarten quotes the line "*My* idea of a perfect woman is one who can write but won't") Lewes ran off to Germany with Marian Evans, a remarkably intellectual woman who had published essays and reviews. He urged her to try novel writing and to read Jane Austen; she did both, and so entered history as "George Eliot," though she wished the world to know her as Mrs. George Henry Lewes.

Ellen Moers
Visiting University Professor
University of Connecticut

Renee Winegarten replies: Ellen Moers makes rather a meal of my opening quotation from the article "A Gentle Hint to Writing-Women" in G. H. Lewes's periodical, the *Leader*. I found it, unascribed to Lewes himself, in Inga-Stina Ewbank's fascinating study of the Brontës, *Their Proper Sphere*. If it is by Lewes in his waggish pose of "Vivian," *that* does not alter the historical point I was trying to make. Moreover, it seems to me that there is something extremely odd about the writer's tone. Lewes, despite his encouragement of women authors, was also capable of conventional thinking, perhaps not entirely surprising in a man of such magpie interests. A detailed study of his varying attitude to George Sand (whom he met, lauded, and even imitated) might illuminate one aspect of his ambivalent responses. He deeply wounded Charlotte Brontë with his review of *Shirley* in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1850, joking ponderously about male superiority, alluding to the coarse "over-masculine vigour" of the author's work, and emphasizing the matter of her sex. As a spinster, Charlotte must have been especially hurt by his cruelly thoughtless allusions to her lack of maternal feelings, and she remarked particularly on the way he treated her as a woman author, not simply as a writer. Lewes spoke of literature as an occupation for single women—married ones should fulfill their grand function of childbearing. True, all this was before his departure for the Continent with Miss Evans. (Ironically, when she became George Eliot, he overprotected her from reviewers!) In many ways a remarkable critic and intriguing figure, Lewes could be equivocal. Where literature written by women is concerned, he was not quite as much of a perfect knight as Ellen Moers would suggest.

Two-Rung Ladder

In his review of my book, *A Sense of the Cosmos* (Autumn 1976), John Woodcock accuses me of being too idealistic in my criticism of current efforts to bring together Eastern mysticism and modern science. As I developed it in my book, the problem involves the passage from one illusion to another, abandoning the dream of *outer progress* and substituting in its place the dream of *inner progress*. Mr. Woodcock feels that it is expecting too much to ask of Western man that he pause in the interval "between dreams" in order thoroughly to constate the real fact that he simply *does not know* what he is. Only if a man stays long enough and quietly enough in front of that fact, so I argue, can he become sensitive to the deeper faculties of intelligence and moral power that lie undeveloped in his nature.

I agree with Mr. Woodcock that such "active passivity" (the same that was urged by Socrates) is very much to ask of any individual, far less of an entire culture. But I am not sure we understand each other as to the nature of this difficulty. As I see it, and as I tried to explain it in my book, the problem can actually be faced by first recognizing that something has gone wrong in modern man's

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general relationship to ideas. Since the Age of Enlightenment, we have tended to assume that grasping an idea intellectually is sufficient basis for an effort to apply the idea and even to promote it. Such an assumption, however, only accentuates the disharmony that exists between the intellectual, emotional, and instinctual aspects of human nature and, when carried to the extremes that characterize the modern era, masks the contradictions between these aspects that result in our inability to live according to what we "know" to be true and good. The ancient teachings seem always to have recognized that certain ideas about man and universe must be transmitted in ways that touch all aspects of human nature, for in each of these aspects there is a quality of mind that needs to be "informed" of the truth in a manner that corresponds to its nature.

The "pause between dreams" that I am speaking of involves the effort to entertain serious new ideas without accepting them as true until one has gone through the work of verifying them. The psycho-spiritual disciplines of the ancient traditions may be understood in part as just such aids in the individual work of discovering the truth for oneself. This practical core of sacred tradition, which I name the *path*, is thus a form of inner empiricism, quite as scientific and rigorous as the outer empiricism of modern science. Far from being idealistic, this point of view identifies idealism as the attraction of one part of the mind to ideas without the corresponding development of the whole man.

This leads to the apparent paradox that only through sacrificing the imaginary idea of progress can there be real inner growth; only through seeing that we do not know either our actual weaknesses or our potential greatness, can we be open enough to hear and then digest truths that come from minds that are greater than our own.

Jacob Needleman
Professor of Philosophy
San Francisco State University

The Other Inflation

Aristides' essay on college grading (Autumn 1976) seemed to me an unusually careful and comprehensive view of the causes and effects of excessive gentleness in this direction. But it could have taken more account of the actual human judgments involved in characteristic cases.

My own experience as a professor of film study may be skewed in that I deal mostly with upper-division and graduate students. But this is where the high averages come from. Students who cannot handle college work in an average or above average way simply don't make it to junior status. They get their Ds and Fs while filling liberal arts group requirements and are flushed out by the minimum required grade-point average before they ever get to be juniors.

After that the teacher is confronted by a twice-sifted class population—fully literate, reasonably active, college-oriented, and survivors of both admissions and promotions. I simply do not find D grade students at the junior level, except in a very small percentage. It is not hard to separate C students out if I give a tough exam emphasizing minor details on the one hand, or highly verbal conceptual essays on the other, or both. At the other end, I feel I am honor bound to give an A for effort to the student who grits his/her teeth and learns everything, equally and promiscuously. Or to the one who really shines in imaginative grasp but misses some practical details. But surely these two kinds of As are as incommensurable as any other qualitative judgment we make. And I am morally certain that many of the people who get Bs from me and from other teachers are as qualified (and perhaps more so) to run the affairs of the country in a reasonable and balanced way as are the more "brilliant" characters who get the graduate scholarships and the hot recommendations.

I still believe in the social usefulness of discrimination through grades and in giving them as firmly as possible on criteria that are as clear as possible within the course work offered. I often tell students that grades are one means of keeping lazy and inadequate candidates from swelling the ranks of the dull and uninformed teachers they already complain of. But I think a larger issue, in these days when most of the students are pretty good, is to insist that they be exposed to a much wider and deeper range of knowledge than they are getting. A fierce dedication to an enriched and widely common liberal education adapted to modern needs—this is what should replace the self-interested specialism that tempts faculty members to court departmental popularity with grade-point permissiveness.

Richard Dyer MacCann
Professor of Film
University of Iowa

The Editors wish to apologize for a printer's error in Sidney Hook's reply to Mortimer Smith's letter, which appeared on page 143 of "The Reader Replies" in the Winter 1976/77 issue of The American Scholar. The sentence reading "Santayana refers to their criticism (p. 538) as an expression of 'a fresh wave of zeal in political and radical [*sic!*] matters' " should have read "Santayana refers to their criticism (p. 538) as an expression of 'a fresh wave of zeal in political and racial [*sic!*] matters.' "

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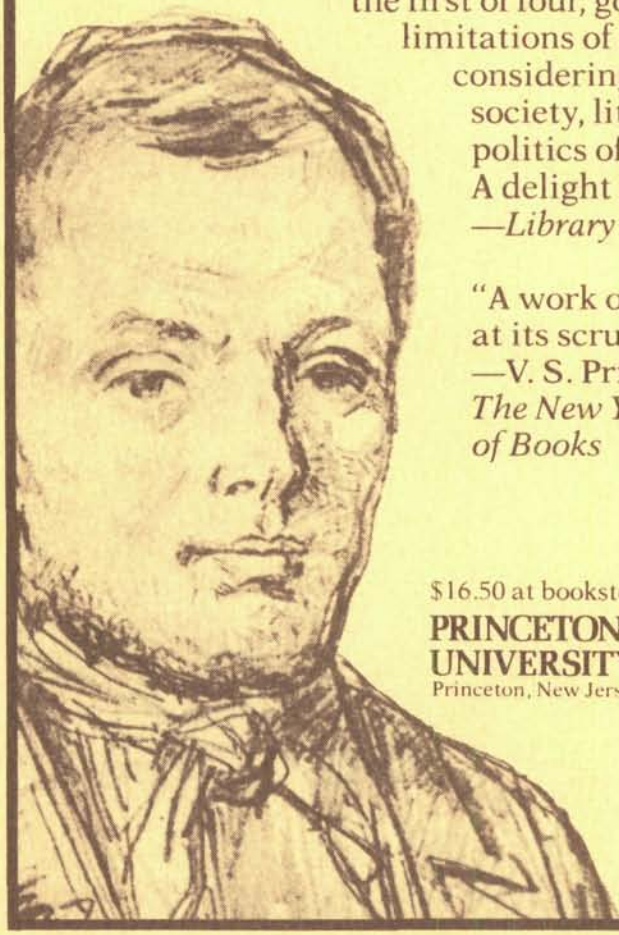

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